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Riverside Edition

THE WRITINGS OF BRET HARTE

VOLUME III

Stories of California and the Frontier

THE STORY OF A MINE

AND OTHER TALES

BY

BRET HARTE

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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THE STORY OF A MINE AND OTHER TALES

THE STORY OF A MINE

I

WHO SOUGHT IT

It was a steep trail leading over the Monterey Coast Range. Concho was very tired, Concho was very dusty, Concho was very much disgusted. To Concho's mind, there was but one relief for these insurmountable difficulties, and that lay in a leathern bottle slung over the mochillas of his saddle. Concho raised the bottle to his lips, took a long draught, made a wry face, and ejaculated, — "Carajo!" It appeared that the bottle did not contain aguardiente, but had lately been filled in a tavern near Tres Pinos by an Irishman who sold bad American whiskey under that pleasing Castilian title. Nevertheless Concho had already nearly emptied the bottle, and it fell back against the saddle as yellow and flaccid as his own cheeks. Thus reinforced, Concho turned to look at the valley behind him, from which he had climbed since noon. It was a sterile waste bordered here and there by arable fringes and valdas of meadow land, but in the main dusty, dry, and forbidding. His eye rested for a moment on a low white cloud-line on the eastern horizon, but so mocking and unsubstantial that it seemed to come and go as he gazed. Concho struck his forehead and winked his hot eyelids. Was it the Sierras or the cursed American whiskey? Again he recommenced

the ascent. At times the half-worn, half-visible trail became utterly lost in the bare black outcrop of the ridge, but his sagacious mule soon found it again, until, stepping upon a loose boulder, she slipped and fell. In vain Concho tried to lift her from out the ruin of camp kettles, prospecting pans and picks; she remained quietly recumbent, occasionally raising her head as if to contemplatively glance over the arid plain below. Then he had recourse to useless blows. Then he essayed profanity of a secular kind, such as "Assassin," "Thief," "Beast with a pig's head," "Food for the bull's horns," but with no effect. Then he had recourse to the curse ecclesiastic: —

"Ah, Judas Iscariot! is it thus, renegade and traitor, thou leavest me, thy master, a league from camp, and supper waiting? Stealer of the Sacrament, get up!"

Still no effect. Concho began to feel uneasy; never before had a mule of pious lineage failed to respond to this kind of exhortation. He made one more desperate attempt:

"Ah, defiler of the altar! lie not there! Look!" he threw his hand into the air, extending the fingers suddenly. "Behold, fiend! I exorcise thee! Ha! tremblest! Look but a little now — see! Apostate! I — I — excommunicate thee — Mula!"

"What are you kicking up such a devil of a row down there for?" said a gruff voice from the rocks above. Concho shuddered. Could it be that the devil was really going to fly away with his mule? He dared not look up.

"Come now," continued the voice, "you just let up on that mule, you d—d old Greaser? Don't you see she 's slipped her shoulder?"

Alarmed as Concho was at the information, he could not help feeling to a certain extent relieved. She was lamed, but had not lost her standing as a good Catholic.

He ventured to lift his eyes. A stranger — an Americano from his dress and accent — was descending the rocks

toward him. He was a slight-built man with a dark, smooth face, that would have been quite commonplace and inexpressive but for his left eye, in which all that was villainous in him apparently centred. Shut that eye, and you had the features and expression of an ordinary man; cover up those features, and the eye shone out like Eblis' own. Nature had apparently observed this, too, and had, by a paralysis of the nerve, ironically dropped the corner of the upper lid over it like a curtain, laughed at her handiwork, and turned him loose to prey upon a credulous world.

"What are you doing here?" said the stranger after he had assisted Concho in bringing the mule to her feet and a helpless halt.

"Prospecting, Señor."

The stranger turned his respectable right eye toward Concho, while his left looked unutterable scorn and wickedness over the landscape.

"Prospecting? what for?"

"Gold and silver, Señor; yet for silver most."

"Alone?"

"Of us there are four."

The stranger looked around.

"In camp, — a league beyond," explained the Mexican.

"Found anything?"

"Of this — much." Concho took from his saddle-bags a lump of greyish iron-ore, studded here and there with star-points of pyrites. The stranger said nothing, but his eye looked a diabolical suggestion.

"You are lucky, friend Greaser."

"Eh?"

"It *is* silver."

"How know you this?"

"It is my business. I'm a metallurgist."

"And you can say what shall be silver and what is not?"

"Yes — see here!" The stranger took from his saddle-

bags a little leather case containing some half dozen vials. One, enwrapped in dark-blue paper, he held up to Concho. "This contains a preparation of silver."

Concho's eyes sparkled, but he looked doubtingly at the stranger.

"Get me some water in your pan."

Concho emptied his water bottle in his prospecting pan and handed it to the stranger. He dipped a dried blade of grass in the bottle, and then let a drop fall from its tip in the water. The water remained unchanged.

"Now throw a little salt in the water," said the stranger.

Concho did so. Instantly a white film appeared on the surface, and presently the whole mass assumed a milky hue.

Concho crossed himself hastily: "Mother of God, it is magic!"

"It is chloride of silver, you darned fool."

Not content with this cheap experiment, the stranger then took Concho's breath away by reddening some litmus paper with the nitrate, and then completely knocked over the simple Mexican by restoring its color by dipping it in the salt water.

"You shall try me this," said Concho, offering his iron ore to the stranger; "you shall use the silver and the salt."

"Not so fast, my friend," answered the stranger. "In the first place this ore must be melted, and then a chip taken and put in shape like this; and that is worth something, my Greaser cherub. No, sir, a man don't spend all his youth at Freiburg and Heidelberg to throw away his science gratuitously on the first Greaser he meets."

"It will cost — eh? — how much?" said the Mexican eagerly.

"Well, I should say it would take about a hundred dollars and expenses to — to — find silver in that ore. But once you've got it there, you're all right for tons of it."

"You shall have it," said the now excited Mexican. "You shall have it of us, — the four! You shall come to our camp and shall melt it — and show the silver and — enough! Come," and in his feverishness he clutched the hand of his companion as if to lead him forth at once.

"What are you going to do with your mule?" said the stranger.

"True, Holy Mother! what, indeed?"

"Look yer," said the stranger, with a grim smile, "she won't stray far, I'll be bound. I've an extra pack-mule above here; you can ride on her, and lead me into camp, and to-morrow come back for your beast."

Poor honest Concho's heart sickened at the prospect of leaving behind the tired servant he had objurgated so strongly a moment before, but the love of gold was uppermost. "I will come back to thee, little one, to-morrow, a rich man. Meanwhile wait thou here, patient one. Adios, thou smallest of mules, Adios!"

And seizing the stranger's hand he clambered up the rocky ledge until they reached the summit. Then the stranger turned and gave one sweep of his malevolent eye over the valley.

Wherefore, in after years, when their story was related, with the devotion of true Catholic pioneers, they named the mountain "La Cañada de la Visitacion del Diablo," "The Gulch of the Visitation of the Devil," the same being now the boundary lines of one of the famous Mexican land grants.

II

WHO FOUND IT

CONCHO was so impatient to reach the camp and deliver his good news to his companions that more than once the stranger was obliged to command him to slacken his pace.

"Is it not enough, you infernal Greaser, that you lame your own mule, but you must try your hand on mine? Or am I to put Jinny down among the expenses?" he added with a grin and a slight lifting of his baleful eyelid.

When they had ridden a mile along the ridge they began to descend again toward the valley. Vegetation now sparingly bordered the trail; clumps of chimisal, an occasional manzanita bush, and one or two dwarfed "buckeyes" rooted their way between the interstices of the black-gray rock. Now and then, in crossing some dry gully worn by the overflow of winter torrents from above, the grayish rock gloom was relieved by dull red and brown masses of color, and almost every overhanging rock bore the mark of a miner's pick. Presently, as they rounded the curving flank of the mountain, from a rocky bench below them, a thin ghost-like stream of smoke seemed to be steadily drawn by invisible hands into the invisible ether. "It is the camp," said Concho gleefully: "I will myself forward to prepare them for the stranger;" and before his companion could detain him he had disappeared at a sharp canter around the curve of the trail.

Left to himself, the stranger took a more leisurely pace, which left him ample time for reflection. Scamp as he was, there was something in the simple credulity of poor Concho that made him uneasy. Not that his moral consciousness was touched, but he feared that Concho's companions might, knowing Concho's simplicity, instantly suspect him of trading upon it. He rode on in a deep study. Was he reviewing his past life? A vagabond by birth and education, a swindler by profession, an outcast by reputation, without absolutely turning his back upon respectability, he had trembled on the perilous edge of criminality ever since his boyhood. He did not scruple to cheat these Mexicans, they were a degraded race; and for a moment he felt almost an accredited agent of progress and civilization.

We never really understand the meaning of enlightenment until we begin to use it aggressively.

A few paces farther on, four figures appeared in the now gathering darkness of the trail. The stranger quickly recognized the beaming smile of Concho, foremost of the party. A quick glance at the faces of the others satisfied him that, while they lacked Concho's good humor, they certainly did not surpass him in intellect. "Pedro" was a stout vaquero; "Manuel" was a slim half-breed and ex-convert of the Mission of San Carmel; and "Miguel" a recent butcher of Monterey. Under the benign influences of Concho, that suspicion with which the ignorant regard strangers died away, and the whole party escorted the stranger — who had given his name as Mr. Joseph Wiles — to their camp-fire. So anxious were they to begin their experiments that even the instincts of hospitality were forgotten, and it was not until Mr. Wiles — now known as "Don José" — sharply reminded them that he wanted some "grub," that they came to their senses. When the frugal meal of tortillas, frijoles, salt pork, and chocolate was over, an oven was built of the dark-red rock brought from the ledge before them, and an earthenware jar, glazed by some peculiar local process, tightly fitted over it, and packed with clay and sods. A fire was speedily built of pine boughs continually brought from a wooded ravine below, and in a few moments the furnace was in full blast. Mr. Wiles did not participate in these active preparations, except to give occasional directions between his teeth, which were contemplatively fixed over a clay pipe as he lay comfortably on his back on the ground. Whatever enjoyment the rascal may have had in their useless labors he did not show it, but it was observed that his left eye often followed the broad figure of the ex-vaquero Pedro, and often dwelt on that worthy's beetling brows and half-savage face. Meeting that baleful glance once, Pedro growled out an oath, but

could not resist a hideous fascination that caused him again and again to seek it.

The scene was weird enough without Wiles' eye to add to its wild picturesqueness. The mountain towered above — a heavy Rembrandtish mass of black shadow — sharply cut here and there against a sky so inconceivably remote that the world-sick soul must have despaired of ever reaching so far, or of climbing its steel-blue walls. The stars were large, keen, and brilliant, but cold and steadfast. They did not dance nor twinkle in their adamantine setting. The furnace fire painted the faces of the men an Indian red, glanced on brightly-colored blanket and serape, but was eventually caught and absorbed in the waiting shadows of the black mountain, scarcely twenty feet from the furnace door. The low, half-sung, half-whispered foreign speech of the group, the roaring of the furnace, and the quick, sharp yelp of a coyote on the plain below, were the only sounds that broke the awful silence of the hills.

It was almost dawn when it was announced that the ore had fused. And it was high time, for the pot was slowly sinking into the fast-crumbling oven. Concho uttered a jubilant "God and Liberty," but Don José Wiles bade him be silent and bring stakes to support the pot. Then Don José bent over the seething mass. It was for a moment only. But in that moment this accomplished metallurgist, Mr. Joseph Wiles, had quietly dropped a silver half dollar into the pot! Then he charged them to keep up the fires and went to sleep — all but one eye.

Dawn came with dull beacon fires on the near hill-tops, and, far in the east, roses over the Sierran snow. Birds twittered in the alder fringes a mile below, and the creaking of wagon wheels — the wagon itself a mere fleck of dust in the distant road — was heard distinctly. Then the melting-pot was solemnly broken by Don José, and the glowing incandescent mass turned into the road to cool.

And then the metallurgist chipped a small fragment from the mass and pounded it, and chipped another smaller piece and pounded that, and then subjected it to acid, and then treated it to a salt bath which became at once milky, and at last produced a white something — *mirabile dictu!* — two cents' worth of silver!

Concho shouted with joy, the rest gazed at each other doubtingly and distrustfully; companions in poverty, they began to diverge and suspect each other in prosperity. Wiles' left eye glanced ironically from the one to the other.

"Here is the hundred dollars, Don José," said Pedro, handing the gold to Wiles with a decidedly brusque intimation that the services and the presence of a stranger were no longer required.

Wiles took the money with a gracious smile and a wink that sent Pedro's heart into his boots, and was turning away, when a cry from Manuel stopped him. "The pot — the pot — it has leaked! look! behold! see!"

He had been cleaning away the crumbled fragments of the furnace to get ready for breakfast, and had disclosed a shining pool of quicksilver!

Wiles started, cast a rapid glance around the group, saw in a flash that the metal was unknown to them, and then said quietly;—

"It is not silver."

"Pardon, Señor; it is, and still molten."

Wiles stooped and ran his fingers through the shining metal.

"Mother of God! what is it, then? — magic?"

"No, only base metal." But then Concho, emboldened by Wiles' experiment, attempted to seize a handful of the glittering mass, that instantly broke through his fingers in a thousand tiny spherules, and even sent a few globules up his shirt sleeves, until he danced around in mingled fear and childish pleasure.

"And it is not worth the taking?" queried Pedro of Wiles.

Wiles' right eye and bland face were turned toward the speaker, but his malevolent left was glancing at the dull red-brown rock on the hillside.

"No!" And, turning abruptly away, he proceeded to saddle his mule.

Manuel, Miguel, and Pedro, left to themselves, began talking earnestly together; while Concho, now mindful of his crippled mule, made his way back to the trail where he had left her. But she was no longer there. Constant to her master through beatings and bullyings, she could not stand incivility and inattention. There are certain qualities of the sex that belong to all animated nature.

Inconsolable, footsore, and remorseful, Concho returned to the camp and furnace, three miles across the rocky ridge. But what was his astonishment on arriving to find the place deserted of man, mule, and camp equipage! Concho called aloud. Only the echoing rocks grimly answered him. Was it a trick? Concho tried to laugh. Ah — yes — a good one — a joke — no — no — they *had* deserted him! And then poor Concho bowed his head to the ground, and, falling on his face, cried as if his honest heart would break.

The tempest passed in a moment; it was not Concho's nature to suffer long, nor brood over an injury. As he raised his head again, his eye caught the shimmer of the quicksilver, — that pool of merry antic metal that had so delighted him an hour before. In a few moments Concho was again disporting with it; chasing it here and there, rolling it in his palms, and laughing with boylike glee at its elusive freaks and fancies. "Ah, sprightly one — skipjack — there thou goest — come here. This way — now I have thee, little one — come, muchacha — come and kiss me," until he had quite forgotten the defection of his companions. And even when he shouldered his sorry pack he was fain to

carry his playmate away with him in his empty leathern flask.

And yet I fancy the sun looked kindly on him as he strode cheerily down the black mountain side, and his step was none the less free nor light that he carried with him neither the silver nor the crime of his late comrades.

III

WHO CLAIMED IT

The fog had already closed in on Monterey, and was now rolling a white, billowy sea above, that soon shut out the blue breakers below. Once or twice in descending the mountain Concho had overhung the cliff and looked down upon the curving horseshoe of a bay below him, distant yet many miles. Earlier in the afternoon he had seen the gilt cross on the whitefaced Mission flare in the sunlight, but now all was gone. By the time he reached the highway of the town it was quite dark, and he plunged into the first fonda at the wayside, and endeavored to forget his woes and his weariness in aguardiente. But Concho's head ached, and his back ached, and he was so generally distressed that he bethought him of a medico — an American doctor — lately come into the town, who had once treated Concho and his mule with apparently the same medicine and after the same heroic fashion. Concho reasoned, not illogically, that, if he were to be physicked at all, he ought to get the worth of his money. The grotesque extravagance of life, of fruit and vegetable, in California was inconsistent with infinitesimal doses. In Concho's previous illness the Doctor had given him a dozen 4-gr. quinine powders. The following day the grateful Mexican walked into the Doctor's office — cured. The Doctor was gratified until, on examination, it appeared that to save trouble, and because his

memory was poor, Concho had taken all the powders in one dose. The Doctor shrugged his shoulders and — altered his practice.

"Well," said Dr. Guild, as Concho sank down exhaustedly in one of the Doctor's two chairs, "what now? Have you been sleeping again in the tule marshes, or are you upset with commissary whiskey? Come, have it out."

But Concho declared that the devil was in his stomach, that Judas Iscariot had possessed himself of his spine, that imps were in his forehead, and that his feet had been scourged by Pontius Pilate.

"That means 'blue mass,'" said the Doctor, and gave it to him, a bolus as large as a musket-ball and as heavy.

Concho took it on the spot and turned to go.

"I have no money, Señor Medico."

"Never mind. It 's only a dollar, the price of the medicine."

Concho looked guilty at having gulped down so much cash. Then he said timidly: —

"I have no money, but I have got here that which is fine and jolly. It is yours," and he handed over the contents of the precious tin can he had brought with him.

The Doctor took it, looked at the shivering volatile mass, and said, "Why, this is quicksilver!"

Concho laughed. "Yes, very quick silver, — so!" and he snapped his fingers to show its sprightliness.

The Doctor's face grew earnest. "Where did you get this, Concho?" he finally asked.

"It ran from the pot in the mountains beyond."

The Doctor looked incredulous. Then Concho related the whole story.

"Could you find that spot again?"

"Madre de Dios, yes. I have a mule there; may the devil fly away with her!"

"And you say your comrades saw this?"

"Why not?"

"And you say they afterwards left you — deserted you?"

"They did, ingrates!"

The Doctor arose and shut his office door. "Hark ye, Concho," he said, "that bit of medicine I gave you just now was worth a dollar. It was worth a dollar because the material of which it was composed was made from the stuff you have in that can, — quicksilver, or mercury. It is one of the most valuable of metals, especially in a gold-mining country. My good fellow, if you know where to find enough of it, your fortune is made."

Concho rose to his feet.

"Tell me, was the rock you built your furnace of red?"

"Si, Señor."

"And brown?"

"Si, Señor."

"And crumbled under the heat?"

"As to nothing."

"And did you see much of this red rock?"

"The mountain mother is in travail with it."

"Are you sure that your comrades have not taken possession of the mountain mother?"

"As how?"

"By claiming its discovery under the mining laws, or by preëmption?"

"They shall not."

"But how will you, single-handed, fight the four? for I doubt not your scientific friend has a hand in it."

"I will fight."

"Yes, my Concho; but suppose I take the fight off your hands? Now, here's a proposition: I will get half a dozen Americanos to go in with you. You will have to get money to work the mine, — you will need funds. You shall share half with them. They will take the risk, raise the money, and protect you."

"I see," said Concho, nodding his head and winking his eyes rapidly. "Bueno!"

"I will return in ten minutes," said the Doctor, taking his hat. He was as good as his word. In ten minutes he returned with six original locaters, a board of directors, a president, secretary, and a deed of incorporation of the "Blue Mass Quicksilver Mining Co." This latter was a delicate compliment to the Doctor, who was popular. The president added to these necessary articles a revolver.

"Take it," he said, handing over the weapon to Concho, "take it; my horse is outside; take that, ride like h—l and hang on until we come!"

In another moment Concho was in the saddle. Then the mining director lapsed into the physician.

"I hardly know," said Dr. Guild doubtfully, "if in your present condition you ought to travel. You have just taken a powerful medicine," and the Doctor looked hypocritically concerned.

"Ah — the devil!" laughed Concho; "what is the quicksilver that is *in* to that which is *out?* Hoopa la! Mula!" And with a clatter of hoofs and jingle of spurs, he was presently lost in the darkness.

"You were none too soon, gentlemen," said the American alcalde, as he drew up before the Doctor's door; "another company has just been incorporated for the same location, I reckon."

"Who are they?"

"Three Mexicans: Pedro, Manuel, and Miguel, headed by that d—d cockeyed Sydney Duck, Wiles."

"Are they here?"

"Manuel and Miguel only. The others are over at Tres Pinos lally-gagging Roscommon and trying to rope him in to pay off their whiskey bills at his grocery."

"If that 's so we need n't start before sunrise, for they 're sure to get roaring drunk."

And this legitimate successor of the grave Mexican alcaldes, having thus delivered his impartial opinion, rode away.

Meanwhile Concho the redoubtable, Concho the fortunate, spared neither riata nor spur. The way was dark, the trail obscure and at times even dangerous, and Concho, familiar as he was with these mountain fastnesses, often regretted his surefooted "Francisquita." "Care not, O Concho," he would say to himself, "'tis but a little while, only a little while, and thou shalt have another Francisquita to bless thee. Eh, skipjack, there was fine music to thy dancing. A dollar for an ounce — 't is as good as silver and merrier." Yet for all his good spirits he kept a sharp lookout at certain bends of the mountain trail; not for assassins or brigands, for Concho was physically courageous, but for the Evil One, who, in various forms, was said to lurk in the Santa Cruz Range, to the great discomfort of all true Catholics. He recalled the incident of Ignacio, a muleteer of the Franciscan Friars, who, stopping at the "Angelus" to repeat the "Credo," saw Luzbel plainly in the likeness of a monstrous grizzly bear, mocking him by sitting on his haunches and lifting his paws, clasped together, as if in prayer. Nevertheless, with one hand grasping his reins and his rosary, and the other clutching his whiskey flask and revolver, he fared on so excellently that he reached the summit as the earlier streaks of dawn were outlining the far-off Sierran peaks. Tethering his horse on a strip of table-land, he descended cautiously afoot until he reached the bench, the wall of red rock, and the crumbled and dismantled furnace. It was as he had left it that morning; there was no trace of recent human visitation. Revolver in hand, Concho examined every cave, gully, and recess, peered behind trees, penetrated copses of buckeye and manzanita, and listened. There was no sound but the faint soughing of the wind over the pines below him. For a while he paced backward and forward with a vague

sense of being a sentinel, but his mercurial nature soon rebelled against this monotony, and soon the fatigues of the day began to tell upon him. Recourse to his whiskey flask only made him the drowsier, until at last he was fain to lie down and roll himself up tightly in his blanket. The next moment he was sound asleep.

His horse neighed twice from the summit, but Concho heard him not. Then the brush crackled on the ledge above him, a small fragment of rock rolled near his feet; but he stirred not. And then two black figures were outlined on the crags beyond.

"St-t-t!" whispered a voice. "There is one lying beside the furnace." The speech was Spanish, but the voice was Wiles'.

The other figure crept cautiously to the edge of the crag and looked over. "It is Concho, the imbecile," said Pedro contemptuously.

"But if he should not be alone, or if he should waken?"

"I will watch and wait. Go you and affix the notification."

Wiles disappeared. Pedro began to creep down the face of the rocky ledge, supporting himself by chimisal and brushwood.

The next moment Pedro stood beside the unconscious man. Then he looked cautiously around. The figure of his companion was lost in the shadow of the rocks above; only a slight crackle of brush betrayed his whereabouts. Suddenly Pedro flung his serape over the sleeper's head, and then threw his powerful frame and tremendous weight full upon Concho's upturned face, while his strong arms clasped the blanket-pinioned limbs of his victim. There was a momentary upheaval, a spasm, and a struggle; but the tightly rolled blanket clung to the unfortunate man like cerements.

There was no noise, no outcry, no sound of struggle. There was nothing to be seen but the peaceful, prostrate figures of the two men darkly outlined on the ledge. They might have been sleeping in each other's arms. In the black silence the stealthy tread of Wiles in the bush above was distinctly audible.

Gradually the struggles grew fainter. Then a whisper from the crags: —

"I can't see you. What are you doing?"

"Watching!"

"Sleeps he?"

"He sleeps!"

"Soundly?"

"Soundly."

"After the manner of the dead?"

"After the fashion of the dead!"

The last tremor had ceased. Pedro rose as Wiles descended.

"All is ready," said Wiles; "you are a witness of my placing the notifications?"

"I am a witness."

"But of this one?" pointing to Concho. "Shall we leave him here?"

"A drunken imbecile — why not?"

Wiles turned his left eye on the speaker. They chanced to be standing nearly in the same attitude they had stood the preceding night. Pedro uttered a cry and an imprecation, "Carramba! Take your devil's eye from me! What see you? Eh — what?"

"Nothing, good Pedro," said Wiles, turning his bland right cheek to Pedro. The infuriated and half-frightened ex-vaquero returned the long knife he had half drawn from its sheath, and growled surlily: —

"Go on, then! But keep thou on that side and I will on this." And so, side by side, listening, watching, distrust-

ful of all things, but mainly of each other, they stole back and up into those shadows from which they might have been evoked.

A half hour passed, in which the east brightened, flashed, and again melted into gold. And then the sun came up haughtily, and a fog that had stolen across the summit in the night arose and fled up the mountain side, tearing its white robes in its guilty haste, and leaving them fluttering from tree and crag and scar. A thousand tiny blades, nestling in the crevices of rocks, nurtured in storms, and rocked by the trade-winds, stretched their wan and feeble arms toward him; but Concho the strong, Concho the brave, Concho the light-hearted, spake not nor stirred.

IV

WHO TOOK IT

There was persistent neighing in the summit. Concho's horse wanted his breakfast.

This protestation reached the ears of a party ascending the mountain from its western face. To one of the party it was familiar.

"Why, blank it all, that 's Chiquita. That d—d Mexican 's lying drunk somewhere," said the President of the B. M. Co.

"I don't like the look of this at all," said Dr. Guild, as they rode up beside the indignant animal. "If it had been an American it might have been carelessness, but no Greaser ever forgets his beast. Drive ahead, boys; we may be too late."

In half an hour they came in sight of the ledge below, the crumbled furnace, and the motionless figure of Concho, wrapped in a blanket, lying prone in the sunlight.

"I told you so — drunk," said the President.

The doctor looked grave, but did not speak. They dismounted and picketed their horses, then crept on all-fours to the ledge above the furnace. There was a cry from Secretary Gibbs, "Look yer. Some feller has been jumping us, boys. See these notices."

There were two notices on canvas affixed to the rock, claiming the ground, and signed by Pedro, Manuel, Miguel, Wiles, and Roscommon.

"This was done, Doctor, while your trustworthy Greaser locater — d—n him — lay there drunk. What 's to be done now?"

But the Doctor was making his way to the unfortunate cause of their defeat lying there quite mute to their reproaches. The others followed him.

The Doctor knelt beside Concho, unrolled him, placed his hand upon his waist, his ear over his heart, and then said, —

"Dead."

"Of course. He got medicine of you last night. This comes of your d—d heroic practice."

But the Doctor was too much occupied to heed the speaker's raillery. He had peered into Concho's protuberant eye, opened his mouth, and gazed at the swollen tongue, and then suddenly rose to his feet.

"Tear down those notices, boys, but keep them. Put up your own. Don't be alarmed, you will not be interfered with, for here is murder added to robbery."

"Murder!"

"Yes," said the Doctor excitedly, "I 'll take my oath on any inquest that this man was strangled to death. He was surprised while asleep. Look here." He pointed to the revolver still in Concho's stiffening hand, which the murdered man had instantly cocked, but could not use in the struggle.

"That 's so," said the President, "no man goes to sleep with a cocked revolver. What 's to be done?"

"Everything," said the Doctor. "This deed was committed within the last two hours; the body is still warm. The murderer did not come our way, or we should have met him on the trail. He is, if anywhere, between here and Tres Pinos."

"Gentlemen," said the President with a slight preparatory and half-judicial cough, "two of you will stay here and stick! The others will follow me to Tres Pinos. The law has been outraged. You understand the Court!"

By some odd influence the little group of half-cynical, half-trifling, and wholly reckless men had become suddenly sober, earnest citizens. They said, "Go on," nodded their heads, and betook themselves to their horses.

"Had we not better wait for the inquest and swear out a warrant?" said the Secretary cautiously.

"How many men have we?"

"Five!"

"Then," said the President, summing up the Revised Statutes of the State of California in one strong sentence, "then we don't want no d—d warrant."

V

WHO HAD A LIEN ON IT

It was high noon at Tres Pinos. The three pines from which it gained its name, in the dusty road and hot air, seemed to smoke from their balsamic spires. There was a glare from the road, a glare from the sky, a glare from the rocks, a glare from the white canvas roofs of the few shanties and cabins which made up the village. There was even a glare from the unpainted red-wood boards of Roscommon's grocery and tavern, and a tendency on the warping floor of the veranda to curl up beneath the feet of the

intruder. A few mules, near the watering-trough, had shrunk within the scant shadow of the corral.

The grocery business of Mr. Roscommon, although adequate and sufficient for the village, was not exhausting nor overtaxing to the proprietor; the refilling of the pork and flour barrel of the average miner was the work of a brief hour on Saturday nights, but the daily replenishment of the average miner with whiskey was arduous and incessant. Roscommon spent more time behind his bar than his grocer's counter. Add to this the fact that a long shed-like extension or wing bore the legend, "Cosmopolitan Hotel, Board or Lodging by the Day or Week. M. Roscommon," and you got an idea of the variety of the proprietor's functions. The "hotel," however, was more directly under the charge of Mrs. Roscommon, a lady of thirty years, strong, truculent, and good-hearted.

Mr. Roscommon had early adopted the theory that most of his customers were insane, and were to be alternately bullied or placated, as the case might be. Nothing that occurred, no extravagance of speech or act, ever ruffled his equilibrium, which was as dogged and stubborn as it was outwardly calm. When not serving liquors, or in the interval while it was being drunk, he was always wiping his counter with an exceedingly dirty towel, or, indeed, anything that came handy. Miners, noticing this purely perfunctory habit, occasionally supplied him slyly with articles inconsistent with their service, — fragments of their shirts and under-clothing, flour-sacking, tow, and once with a flannel petticoat of his wife's, stolen from the line in the back yard. Roscommon would continue his wiping without looking up, but yet conscious of the presence of each customer. "And it's not another dhrop ye'll git, Jack Brown, until ye've wiped out the black score that stands agin ye." "And it's there ye are, darlint, and it's here's the bottle that's been lukin' for ye sins Saturday." "And

fwhat hev ye done with the last I sent ye, ye divil of a M'Corkle? and here 's me back that 's bruk entoirely wid dipping intil the pork barl to give ye the best sides, — and ye spending yur last cint on a tare into Gilroy. Whist! and if it 's fer foighting ye are, boys, there 's an 'lligant bit o' sod beyant the corral, and it's maybe meself 'll come out wid a shtick and be sociable."

On this particular day, however, Master Roscommon was not in his usual spirits; and when the clatter of horses' hoofs before the door announced the approach of strangers, he absolutely ceased wiping his counter, and looked up, as Dr. Guild, the President and Secretary of the new company, strode into the shop.

"We are looking," said the President, "for a man by the name of Wiles, and three Mexicans known as Pedro, Manuel, and Miguel."

"Ye are?"

"We are!"

"Faix, and I hope ye 'll foind 'em. And if ye 'll git from 'em the score I 've got agin 'em, darlint, I 'll add a blessing to it."

There was a laugh at this from the bystanders, who, somehow, resented the intrusion of these strangers.

"I fear you will find it no laughing matter, gentlemen," said Dr. Guild a little stiffly, "when I tell you that a murder has been committed, and the men I am seeking within an hour of that murder put up that notice signed by their names," and Dr. Guild displayed the paper.

There was a breathless silence among the crowd as they eagerly pressed around the Doctor. Only Roscommon kept on wiping his counter.

"You will observe, gentlemen, that the name of Roscommon also appears on this paper as one of the original locaters."

"And sure, darlint," said Roscommon without looking up,

"if ye've no better ividince agin them boys then ye have forninst me, it's home ye'd betther be riding to wanst. For it's meself as has n't sturred fut out of the store the day and noight — more betoken as the boys I've sarved kin testify."

"That's so, Ross," chorused the crowd; "we've been running the old man all night."

"Then how comes your name on this paper?"

"Oh, murdher! will ye listin to him, boys! As if every felly that owed me a whiskey bill did n't come to me and say, 'Ah, Misther Roscommon,' or 'Moike,' as the case moight be, 'sure it's an illigant sthrike I've made this day, and it's meself that has put down your name as an original locater, and yer fortune's made, Mr. Roscommon, and will yer fill me up another quart for the good luck betune you and me?' Ah, but ask Jack Brown over yan if it is n't sick that I am of his original locations."

The laugh that followed this speech, and its practical application, convinced the party that they had blundered, that they could obtain no clue to the real culprits here, and that any attempt by threats would meet violent opposition. Nevertheless the Doctor was persistent.

"When did you see these men last?"

"When did I see them, is it? Bedad, what with sarvin' up the liquor and keeping me counters dry and swate I never see them at all."

"That's so!" chorused the crowd again, to whom the whole proceeding was delightfully farcical.

"Then I can tell you, gentlemen," said the Doctor stiffly, "that they were in Monterey last night, that they did not return on that trail this morning, and that they must have passed here at daybreak."

With these words, which the Doctor regretted as soon as delivered, the party rode away.

Mr. Roscommon resumed his service and counter-wiping.

But late that night, when the bar was closed and the last loiterer summarily ejected, Mr. Roscommon, in the conjugal privacy of his chamber, produced a legal-looking paper. "Read it, Maggie, darlint; for it's meself never had the larnin' nor the parts."

Mrs. Roscommon took the paper.

"Shure, it's law papers, making over some property to yez. O Moike! ye have n't been spekilating?"

"Whist! and fwhatz that durty gray paper wid the sales and flourishes?"

"Faix, it bothers me intoirely. Shure it oin't in English."

"Whist! Maggie, it's a Spanish grant!"

"A Spanish grant? O Moike, and what did ye giv for it?"

Mr. Roscommon laid his finger beside his nose and said softly, "Whishkey!"

VI

HOW A GRANT WAS GOT FOR IT

While the Blue Mass Company, with more zeal than discretion, were actively pursuing Pedro and Wiles over the road to Tres Pinos, Señores Miguel and Manuel were comfortably seated in a fonda at Monterey, smoking cigarritos and discussing their late discovery. But they were in no better mood than their late companions, and it appeared from their conversation that in an evil moment they had sold out their interest in the alleged silver mine to Wiles and Pedro for a few hundred dollars, succumbing to what they were assured would be an active opposition on the part of the Americanos. The astute reader will easily understand that the accomplished Mr. Wiles did not inform them of its value as a quicksilver mine, although he

was obliged to impart his secret to Pedro as a necessary accomplice and reckless coadjutor. That Pedro felt no qualms of conscience in thus betraying his two comrades may be inferred from his recent direct and sincere treatment of Concho; and that he would, if occasion offered or policy made it expedient, as calmly obliterate Mr. Wiles, that gentleman himself never for a moment doubted.

"If we had waited but a little he would have given more, this cockeye!" regretted Manuel querulously.

"Not a peso," said Miguel firmly.

"And why, my Miguel? Thou knowest we could have worked the mine ourselves."

"Good, and lost even that labor. Look you, little brother. Show to me now the Mexican that has ever made a reál of a mine in California. How many, eh? None! Not a one. Who owns the Mexican's mine, eh? Americanos! Who takes money from the Mexican's mine? Americanos. Thou rememberest Briones, who spent a gold mine to make a silver one? Who has the lands and house of Briones? Americanos! Who has the cattle of Briones? Americanos! Who has the mine of Briones? Americanos! Who has the silver Briones never found? Americanos! Always the same! Forever! Ah! carramba!"

Then the Evil One evidently took it into his head and horns to worry and toss these men — comparatively innocent as they were — still further, for a purpose. For presently to them appeared one Victor Garcia, whilom a clerk of the Ayuntemiento, who rallied them over aguardiente, and told them the story of the quicksilver discovery, and the two mining claims taken out that night by Concho and Wiles. Whereat Manuel exploded with profanity and burnt blue with sulphurous malediction; but Miguel, the recent ecclesiastic, sat livid and thoughtful. Finally came a pause in Manuel's bombardment, and something like this conversation took place between the cooler actors: —

Miguel (thoughtfully). "When was it thou didst petition for lands in the valley, friend Victor?"

Victor (amazedly). "Never! It is a sterile waste. Am I a fool?"

Miguel (softly). "Thou didst. Of thy Governor, Micheltorena. I have seen the application."

Victor (beginning to appreciate a rodential odor). "Si! I had forgotten. Art thou sure it was in the valley?"

Miguel (persuasively). "In the valley and up the falda."[1]

Victor (with decision). "Certainly. Of a verity — the falda likewise."

Miguel (eyeing Victor). "And yet thou hadst not the grant. Painful is it that it should have been burned with the destruction of the other archives by the Americanos at Monterey."

Victor (cautiously, feeling his way). "Possiblemente."

Miguel. "It might be wise to look into it."

Victor (bluntly). "As why?"

Miguel. "For our good and thine, friend Victor. We bring thee a discovery; thou bringest us thy skill, thy experience, thy government knowledge — thy Custom-House paper."[2]

Manuel (breaking in drunkardly). "But for what? We are Mexicans. Are we not fated? We shall lose. Who shall keep the Americanos off?"

Miguel. "We shall take *one* American in! Ha! seest thou? This American comrade shall bribe his courts, his corregidores. After a little he shall supply the men who invent the machine of steam, the mill, the furnace, eh?"

[1] Falda, or valda, *i. e.* that part of the skirt of a woman's robe that breaks upon the ground, and is also applied to the final slope of a hill, from the angle that it makes upon the level plain.

[2] Grants, applications, and official notifications, under the Spanish Government, were drawn on a stamped paper known as Custom-House paper.

Victor. "But who is he — not to steal?"

Miguel. "He is that man of Ireland, a good Catholic at Tres Pinos."

Victor and Manuel (omnes). "Roscommon?"

Miguel. "Of the same. We shall give him a share for the provisions, for the tools, for the aguardiente. It is of the Irish that the Americanos have great fear. It is of them that the votes are made, that the President is chosen. It is of him that they make the alcalde in San Francisco. And we are of the Church, like him."

They said "Bueno" all together, and for the moment appeared to be upheld by a religious enthusiasm, — a joint confession of faith that meant death, destruction, and possibly forgery, as against the men who thought otherwise.

This spiritual harmony did away with all practical consideration and doubt. "I have a little niece," said Victor, "whose work with the pen is marvelous. If one says to her, 'Carmen, copy me this, or the other one,' — even if it be copperplate, — look you it is done, and you cannot know of which is the original. Madre de Dios! the other day she makes me a rubric[1] of the Governor, Pio Pico, — the same, identical. Thou knowest her, Miguel. She asked concerning thee yesterday."

With the embarrassment of an underbred man, Miguel tried to appear unconcerned, but failed dismally. Indeed, I fear that the black eyes of Carmen had already done their perfect and accepted work, and had partly induced the application for Victor's aid. He, however, dissembled so far as to ask, —

"But will she not know?"

"She is a child."

"But will she not talk?"

"Not if I say nay, and if thou — eh, Miguel?"

[1] The Spanish "rubric" is the complicated flourish attached to a signature, and is as individual and characteristic as the handwriting.

This bit of flattery — which, by the way, was a lie, for Victor's niece did not incline favorably to Miguel — had its effect. They shook hands over the table.

"But," said Miguel, "what is to be done must be done now."

"At the moment," said Victor, "and thou shalt see it done. Eh! Does it content thee? then come!"

Miguel nodded to Manuel. "We will return in an hour; wait thou here."

They filed out into the dark, irregular street. Fate led them to pass the office of Dr. Guild at the moment that Concho mounted his horse. The shadows concealed them from their rival, but they overheard the last injunctions of the President to the unlucky Concho.

"Thou hearest?" said Miguel, clutching his companion's arm.

"Yes," said Victor. "But let him ride, my friend; in one hour we shall have that that shall arrive *years* before him," and with a complacent chuckle they passed unseen and unheard until, abruptly turning a corner, they stopped before a low adobe house.

It had once been a somewhat pretentious dwelling, but had evidently followed the fortunes of its late owner, Don Juan Briones, who had offered it as a last sop to the three-headed Cerberus that guarded the El Refugio Plutonian treasures, and who had swallowed it in a single gulp. It was in a very bad case. The furrows of its red-tiled roof looked as if they were the results of age and decrepitude. Its best room had a musty smell; there was the dampness of deliquescence in its slow decay, but the Spanish Californians were sensible architects, and its massive walls and partitions defied the earthquake thrill, and all the year round kept an even temperature within.

Victor led Miguel through a low anteroom into a plainly furnished chamber, where Carmen sat painting.

Now Mistress Carmen was a bit of a painter, in a pretty little way, with all the vague longings of an artist, but without, I fear, the artist's steadfast soul. She recognized beauty and form as a child might, without understanding their meaning, and somehow failed to make them even interpret her woman's moods, which surely were nature's, too. So she painted everything with this innocent lust of the eye — flowers, birds, insects, landscapes, and figures — with a joyous fidelity, but no particular poetry. The bird never sang to her but one song, the flowers or trees spake but one language, and her skies never brightened except in color. She came out strong on the Catholic saints, and would toss you up a cleanly-shaven Aloysius, sweetly destitute of expression, or a dropsical, lethargic Madonna that you could n't have told from an old master, so bad it was. Her faculty of faithful reproduction even showed itself in fanciful lettering, and latterly in the imitation of rubrics and signatures. Indeed, with her eye for beauty of form she had always excelled in penmanship at the Convent, an accomplishment which the good Sisters held in great repute.

In person she was petite, with a still unformed, girlish figure, perhaps a little too flat across the back, and with possibly a too great tendency to a boyish stride in walking. Her brow, covered by blue-black hair, was low and frank and honest; her eyes, a very dark hazel, were not particularly large, but rather heavily freighted in their melancholy lids with sleeping passion; her nose was of that unimportant character which no man remembers; her mouth was small and straight, her teeth white and regular. The whole expression of her face was piquancy that might be subdued by tenderness or made malevolent by anger. At present it was a salad in which the oil and vinegar were deftly combined. The astute feminine reader will of course understand that this is the ordinary superficial masculine criti-

cism, and at once make up her mind both as to the character of the young lady and the competency of the critic. I only know that *I* rather liked her. And her functions are somewhat important in this veracious history.

She looked up, started to her feet, leveled her black brows at the intruder, but, at a sign from her uncle, showed her white teeth and spake.

It was only a sentence, and a rather commonplace one at that; but if she could have put her voice upon her canvas she might have retrieved the Garcia fortunes. For it was so musical, so tender, so sympathizing, so melodious, so replete with the graciousness of womankind, that she seemed to have invented the language. And yet that sentence was only an exaggerated form of the "How d' ye do," whined out, doled out, lisped out, or shot out from the pretty mouths of my fair countrywomen.

Miguel admired the paintings. He was struck particularly with a crayon drawing of a mule: "Mother of God! it is the mule itself — observe how it will not go."

Then the crafty Victor broke in with, "But it is nothing to her writing; look, you shall tell to me which is the handwriting of Pio Pico," and from a drawer in the secretary he drew forth two signatures. One was affixed to a yellowish paper, the other drawn on plain white foolscap.

Of course Miguel took the more modern one with loverlike gallantry. "It is this is genuine!"

Victor laughed triumphantly. Carmen echoed the laugh melodiously in childlike glee, and added, with a slight toss of her piquant head, "It is mine!" The best of the sex will not refuse a just and overdue compliment from even the man they dislike. It 's the principle they 're after, not the sentiment.

But Victor was not satisfied with this proof of his niece's skill. "Say to her," he demanded of Miguel, "what name thou lik'st and it shall be done before thee here."

Miguel was not so much in love but he perceived the drift of Victor's suggestion, and remarked that the rubric of Governor Micheltorena was exceedingly complicated and difficult.

"She shall do it!" responded Victor, with decision.

From a file of old departmental papers the Governor's signature and that involved rubric, which must have cost his late Excellency many youthful days of anxiety, was produced and laid before Carmen.

Carmen took her pen in her hand, looked at the brownish-looking document and then at the virgin whiteness of the foolscap before her. "But," she said, pouting prettily, "I should have to first paint this white paper brown. And it will absorb the ink more quickly than that. When I painted the San Antonio of the Mission San Gabriel, for Father Acolti, I had to put the decay in with my oils and brushes before the good Padre would accept it."

The two scamps looked at each other. It was their supreme moment. "I think I have," said Victor, with assumed carelessness, — "I think I have some of the old Custom-House paper." He produced from the secretary a sheet of brown paper with a stamp. "Try it on that."

Carmen smiled with childish delight, tried it, and produced a marvel!

"It is as magic," said Miguel, feigning to cross himself.

Victor's rôle was more serious: he affected to be deeply touched; took the paper, folded it, and placed it in his breast. "I shall make a good fool of Don José Castro," he said: "he will declare it is the Governor's own signature, for he was his friend; but have a care, Carmen! that you spoil it not by the opening of your red lips. When he is fooled I will tell him of this marvel, — this niece of mine, and he shall buy her pictures. Eh, little one?" and he gave her the avuncular caress, *i. e.* a pat of the hand on either cheek, and a kiss. Miguel envied him, but cupidity

outgeneraled Cupid, and presently the conversation flagged, until a convenient recollection of Victor's — that himself and comrade were due at the Posada del Toros at ten o'clock — gave them the opportunity to retire.

But not without a chance shot from Carmen. "Tell to me," she said, half to Victor and half to Miguel, "what has chanced with Concho? He was ever ready to bring to me flowers from the mountain, and insects and birds. Thou knowest how he would sit, O my uncle, and talk to me of the rare rocks he had seen, and the bears and the evil spirits, and now he comes no longer, my Concho! How is this? Nothing evil has befallen him, surely?" and her drooping lids closed half-pathetically.

Miguel's jealousy took fire. "He is drunk, Señorita, doubtless, and has forgotten not only thee, but mayhap his mule and pack! It is his custom, ha! ha!"

The red died out of Carmen's ripe lips, and she shut them together with a snap like a steel purse. The dove had suddenly changed to a hawk; the child-girl into an antique virago; the spirit hitherto dimly outlined in her face, of some shrewish Garcia ancestress, came to the fore. She darted a quick look at her uncle, and then, with her little hands on her rigid hips, strode with two steps up to Miguel.

"Possibly, O Señor Miguel Dominguez Perez [a profound courtesy here], it is as thou sayest. Drunkard Concho may be; but, drunk or sober, he never turned his back on his friend — or — [the words grated a little here] — his enemy."

Miguel would have replied, but Victor was ready. "Fool," he said, pinching his arm, "'t is an old friend. And — and — the application is still to be filled up. Are you crazy?"

But on this point Miguel was not, and, with the revenge of a rival added to his other instincts, he permitted Victor to lead him away.

On their return to the fonda they found Master Manuel too far gone with aguardiente, and a general animosity to the average Americano, to be of any service. So they worked alone, with pen, ink, and paper, in the stuffy, cigarrito-clouded back room of the fonda. It was midnight, two hours after Concho had started, that Miguel clapped spurs to his horse for the village of Tres Pinos, with an application to Governor Micheltorena for a grant to the "Rancho of the Red Rocks" comfortably bestowed in his pocket.

VII

WHO PLEAD FOR IT

There can be little doubt the coroner's jury of Fresno would have returned a verdict of "death from alcoholism," as the result of their inquest into the cause of Concho's death, had not Dr. Guild fought nobly in support of the law and his own convictions. A majority of the jury objected to there being any inquest at all. A sincere juryman thought it hard that, whenever a Greaser pegged out in a sneakin' kind o' way, American citizens should be taken from their business to find out what ailed him. "'Spose he was killed," said another, "thar ain't no time this thirty year he were n't, so to speak, just sufferin' for it, ez his nat'ral right ez a Mexican." The jury at last compromised by bringing in a verdict of homicide against certain parties unknown. Yet it was understood tacitly that these unknown parties were severally Wiles and Pedro; Manuel, Miguel, and Roscommon proving an unmistakable alibi. Wiles and Pedro had fled to Lower California, and Manuel, Miguel, and Roscommon deemed it advisable, in the then excited state of the public mind, to withhold the forged application and claim from the courts and the public

comment. So that for a year after the murder of Concho and the flight of his assassins "The Blue Mass Mining Company" remained in undisturbed and actual possession of the mine, and reigned in their stead.

But the spirit of the murdered Concho would not down, any more than that of the murdered Banquo, and so wrought, no doubt, in a quiet, Concho-like way, sore trouble with the "Blue Mass Company." For a Great Capitalist and Master of Avarice came down to the mine and found it fair, and, taking one of the Company aside, offered to lend his name and a certain amount of coin for a controlling interest, accompanying the generous offer with a suggestion that if it were not acceded to he would be compelled to buy up various Mexican mines and flood the market with quicksilver, to the great detriment of the "Blue Mass Company," which thoughtful suggestion, offered by a man frequently alluded to as one of "California's great mining princes," and as one who had "done much to develop the resources of the State," was not to be lightly considered, and so, after a cautious non-consultation with the Company, and a commendable secrecy, the stockholder sold out. Whereat it was speedily spread abroad that the Great Capitalist had taken hold of "Blue Mass," and the stock went up and the other stockholders rejoiced — until the Great Capitalist found that it was necessary to put up expensive mills, to employ a high-salaried superintendent, in fact to develop the mine by the spending of its earnings, so that the stock quoted at 112 was finally saddled with an assessment of $50 per share. Another assessment of $50 to enable the superintendent to proceed to Russia and Spain and examine into the workings of the quicksilver mines there, and also a general commission to the gifted and scientific Pillageman to examine into the various component parts of quicksilver, and report if it could not be manufactured from ordinary sandstone by steam or electri-

city, speedily brought the other stockholders to their senses. It was at this time that the good fellow "Tom," the serious-minded "Dick," and the speculative but fortunate "Harry," brokers of the Great Capitalist, found it convenient to buy up, for the Great Capitalist aforesaid, the various other shares at great sacrifice.

I fear that I have bored my readers in thus giving the tiresome details of that ingenuous American pastime which my countrymen dismiss in their epigrammatic way as the "freezing-out process." And lest any reader should question the ethics of the proceeding, I beg him to remember that one gentleman accomplished in this art was always a sincere and direct opponent of the late Mr. John Oakhurst, gambler.

But for once the Great Master of Avarice had not taken into sufficient account the avarice of others, and was suddenly and virtuously shocked to learn that an application for a patent for certain lands, known as the "Red Rock Rancho," was about to be offered before the United States Land Commission. This claim covered his mining property. But the information came quietly and secretly, as all of the Great Master's information was obtained, and he took the opportunity to sell out his clouded title and his proprietorship to the only remaining member of the original "Blue Mass" Company, a young fellow of pith, before many-tongued rumor had voiced the news far and wide. The blow was a heavy one to the party left in possession. Saddled by the enormous debts and expenses of the Great Capitalist, with a credit now further injured by the defection of this lucky magnate, who was admired for his skill in anticipating a loss, and whose relinquishment of any project meant ruin to it, the single-handed, impoverished possessor of the mine, whose title was contested and whose reputation was yet to be made, — poor Biggs, first secretary and only remaining officer of the "Blue Mass Company,"

— looked ruefully over his books and his last transfer, and sighed! But I have before intimated that he was built of good stuff, and that he believed in his work — which was well — and in himself, which was better, and so, having faith even as a grain of mustard-seed, I doubt not he would have been able to remove that mountain of quicksilver beyond the over-lapping of fraudulent grants. And, again, Providence — having disposed of these several scamps — raised up to him a friend. But that friend is of sufficient importance to this veracious history to deserve a paragraph to himself.

The Pylades of this Orestes was known of ordinary mortals as Royal Thatcher. His genealogy, birth, and education are, I take it, of little account to this chronicle, which is only concerned with his friendship for Biggs and the result thereof. He had known Biggs a year or two previously; they had shared each other's purses, bunks, cabins, provisions, and often friends, with that perfect freedom from obligation which belonged to the pioneer life. The varying tide of fortune had just then stranded Thatcher on a desert sand-hill in San Francisco, with an uninsured cargo of Expectations, while to Thatcher's active but not curious fancy it had apparently lifted his friend's bark over the bar in the Monterey mountains into an open quicksilver sea. So that he was considerably surprised on receiving a note from Biggs to this purport: —

DEAR ROY, — Run down here and help a fellow. I've too much of a load for one. Maybe we can make a team and pull "Blue-Mass" out yet. BIGGSEY.

Thatcher, sitting in his scantily furnished lodgings, doubtful of his next meal and in arrears for rent, heard this Macedonian cry as St. Paul did. He wrote a promissory and soothing note to his landlady, but, fearing the

"sweet sorrow" of a personal parting, let his collapsed valise down from his window by a cord, and, by means of an economical combination of stage-riding and pedestrianism, he presented himself, at the close of the third day, at Biggs' door. In a few moments he was in possession of the story; half an hour later, in possession of half the mine, its infelix past and its doubtful future, equally with his friend.

Business over, Biggs turned to look at his partner. "You 've aged some since I saw you last," he said. "Starvation luck, I 'spose. I 'd know your eyes, old fellow, if I saw them among ten thousand, but your lips are parched and your mouth 's grimmer than it used to be."

Thatcher smiled, to show that he could still do so, but did not say, as he might have said, that self-control, suppressed resentment, disappointment, and occasional hunger had done something in the way of correcting nature's obvious mistakes, and shutting up a kindly mouth. He only took off his threadbare coat, rolled up his sleeves, and saying, "We 've got lots of work and some fighting before us," pitched into the "affairs" of the Blue Mass Company on the instant.

VIII

OF COUNSEL FOR IT

Meanwhile Roscommon had waited. Then, in Garcia's name and backed by him, he laid his case before the Land Commission, filing the application (with forged indorsements) to Governor Micheltorena, and alleging that the original grant was destroyed by fire. And why ?

It seemed there was a limit to Miss Carmen's imitative talent. Admirable as it was, it did not reach to the reproduction of that official seal, which would have been a necessary appendage to the Governor's grant. But there were letters written on stamped paper by Governor Michel-

torena, to himself, Garcia, and to Miguel, and to Manuel's father, all of which were duly signed by the sign manual and rubric of Mrs. Governor-Micheltorena-Carmen-de-Haro. And then there was "parol" evidence and plenty of it; witnesses who remembered everything about it, — namely, Manuel, Miguel, and the all-recollecting De Haro; here were details, poetical and suggestive; and Dame-Quicklyish, as when his late Excellency, sitting, not "by a sea-coal fire," but with aguardiente and cigarros, had sworn to him, the ex-ecclesiastic Miguel, that he should grant and had granted Garcia's request. There were clouds of witnesses, conversations, letters and records, glib and pat to the occasion. In brief, there was nothing wanted but the seal of his Excellency. The only copy of that was in the possession of a rival school of renaissant art and the restoration of antiques, then doing business before the Land Commission.

And yet the claim was rejected! Having lately recommended two separate claimants to a patent for the same land, the Land Commission became cautious and conservative.

Roscommon was at first astounded, then indignant, and then warlike; he was for an "appale to onst!"

With the reader's previous knowledge of Roscommon's disposition this may seem somewhat inconsistent; but there are certain natures to whom litigation has all the excitement of gambling, and it should be borne in mind that this was his first lawsuit. So that his lawyer, Mr. Saponaceous Wood, found him in that belligerent mood to which counsel are obliged to hypocritically bring all the sophistries of their profession. "Of course you have your right to an appeal, but calm yourself, my dear sir, and consider. The case was presented strongly, the evidence overwhelming on our side, but we happened to be fighting *previous decisions of the Land Commission that had brought them into*

trouble; so that, if Micheltorena had himself appeared in Court and testified to his giving you the grant, it would have made no difference: no Spanish grant had a show then, nor will it have for the next six months. You see, my dear sir, the Government sent out one of its big Washington lawyers to look into this business, and he reported frauds, sir, frauds, in a majority of the Spanish claims. And why, sir, why? He was bought, sir, bought — body and soul — by the Ring!"

"And fwhat 's the Ring?" asked his client, sharply.

"The Ring is — ahem! a combination of unprincipled but wealthy persons to defeat the ends of justice."

"And sure, fwhat 's the Ring to do wid me grant as that thaving Mexican gave me as the collatherals fer the bourd he was owin' me? Eh, mind that now!"

"The Ring, my dear sir, is the other side. It is — ahem! — always the Other Side."

"And why the divil have n't we a Ring, too? And ain't I payin' ye five hundred dollars — and the divil of Ring ye have — at all, at all? Fwhat am I payin' ye fur, eh?"

"That a judicious expenditure of money," began Mr. Wood, "outside of actual disbursements, may not be of infinite service to you, I am not prepared to deny — but" —

"Look ye, Mr. Sappy Wood, it 's the 'appale' I want, and the grant I 'll have, more betoken as the old woman's har-rut and me own is set on it entoirely. Get me the land and I 'll give ye the half of it — and it 's a bargain!"

"But, my dear sir, there are some rules in our profession, — technical though they may be" —

"The divil fly away wid yer profession. Shure is it better nor me own? If I 've risked me provisions and me whiskey, that cost me solid goold in 'Frisco, on the thafe Garcia's claim, bedad! the loikes of ye can risk yer law."

"Well," said Wood, with an awkward smile, "I suppose

that a deed for one half, on the consideration of friendship, my dear sir, and a dollar in hand paid by me, might be reconcilable."

"Now it 's talkin' ye are. But who 's the felly we 're foightin, that 's got the Ring ? "

"Ah, my dear sir, it 's the United States," said the lawyer, with gravity.

"The States ! the Government is it ? And is 't that ye 're afeard of ? Shure it 's the Gov'ment that I fought in me own counthree, it was the Gov'ment that druv me to Ameriky, and is it now that I 'm goin' back on me principles ? "

"Your political sentiments do you great credit," began Mr. Wood.

"But fwhat 's the Gov'ment to do wid the appale ? "

"The Government," said Mr. Wood significantly, "will be represented by the District Attorney."

"And who 's the spalpeen ? "

"It is rumored," said Mr. Wood, slowly, "that a new one is to be appointed. *I* myself have had some ambition that way."

His client bent a pair of cunning but not over-wise gray eyes on his American lawyer. But he only said, "Ye have, eh ? "

"Yes," said Wood, answering the look boldly, "and if I had the support of a number of your prominent countrymen, who are so powerful with *all* parties, — men like *you*, my dear sir, — why I think you might in time become a Conservative, at least more resigned to the Government."

Then the lesser and the greater scamp looked at each other, and for a moment or two felt a warm, sympathetic, friendly emotion for each other, and quietly shook hands.

Depend upon it, there is a great deal more kindly human sympathy between two openly confessed scamps than there is in that calm, respectable recognition that you and I, dear

reader, exhibit when we happen to oppose each other with our respective virtues.

"And ye 'll get the appale?"

"I will."

And he DID! And, by a singular coincidence, got the District Attorneyship also; and with a deed for one half of the "Red Rock Rancho" in his pocket, sent a brother lawyer in court to appear for his client, the United States, as against *himself*, Roscommon, Garcia et al. Wild horses could not have torn him from this noble resolution. There is an indescribable delicacy in the legal profession which we literary folk ought to imitate.

The United States lost! Which meant ruin and destruction to the Blue Mass Company, who had bought from a paternal and beneficent Government lands which did n't belong to it. The Mexican grant, of course, antedated the occupation of the mine by Concho, Wiles, Pedro et al., as well as by the "Blue Mass Company," and the solitary partners, Biggs and Thatcher. More than that, it swallowed up their improvements; it made Biggs and Thatcher responsible to Garcia for all the money the Grand Master of Avarice had made out of it. Mr. District Attorney was apparently distressed, but resigned. Messrs. Biggs and Thatcher were really distressed and combative.

And then, to advance a few years in this chronicle, began real litigation with earnestness, vigor, courage, zeal, and belief on the part of Biggs and Thatcher, and technicalities, delay, equivocation, and a general Fabian-like policy on the part of Garcia, Roscommon et al. Of all these tedious processes I note but one which, for originality and audacity of conception, appears to me to indicate more clearly the temper and civilization of the epoch. A subordinate officer of the District Court refused to obey the mandate ordering a transcript of the record to be sent up to the United States Supreme Court. It is to be regretted that the name

of this Ephesian youth, who thus fired the dome of our constitutional liberties, should have been otherwise so unimportant as to be confined to the dusty records of that doubtful court of which he was a doubtful servitor, and that his claim to immortality ceased with his double-fee'd service. But there still stands on record a letter by this young gentleman arraigning the legal wisdom of the land, which is not entirely devoid of amusement or even instruction to young men desirous of obtaining publicity and capital. Howbeit the Supreme Court was obliged to protect itself by procuring the legislation of his functions out of his local fingers into the larger palm of its own attorney.

These various processes of law and equity, which, when exercised practically in the affairs of ordinary business, might have occupied a few months' time, dragged, clung, retrograded or advanced slowly during a period of eight or nine years. But the strong arms of Biggs and Thatcher held POSSESSION, and, possibly by the same tactics employed on the other side, arrested or delayed ejectment, and so made and sold quicksilver, while their opponents were spending gold, until Biggs, sorely hit in the interlacings of his armor, fell in the lists, his cheek growing waxen and his strong arm feeble, and, finding himself in this sore condition, and passing, as it were, made over his share in trust to his comrade and died. Whereat, from that time henceforward, Royal Thatcher reigned in his stead.

And so, having anticipated the legal record, we will go back to the various human interests that helped to make it up.

To begin with Roscommon. To do justice to his later conduct and expressions, it must be remembered that when he accepted the claim for the "Red Rock Rancho," yet unquestioned, from the hands of Garcia, he was careless, or at least unsuspicious of fraud. It was not until he had experienced the intoxication of litigation that he felt some-

how that he was a wronged and defrauded man, but, with the obstinacy of defrauded men, preferred to arraign some one fact or individual as the impelling cause of his wrong, rather than the various circumstances that led to it. To his simple mind it was made patent that the "Blue Mass Company" were making money out of a mine which he claimed, and which was not yet adjudged to them. Every dollar they took out was a fresh count in this general indictment. Every delay toward this adjustment of rights — although made by his own lawyer — was a personal wrong. The mere fact that there never was or had been any *quid pro quo* for this immense property — that it had fallen to him for a mere song — only added zest to his struggle. The possibility of his losing this mere speculation affected him more strongly than if he had already paid down the million he expected to get from the mine. I don't know that I have indicated as plainly as I might that universal preference on the part of mankind to get something from nothing, and to acquire the largest return for the least possible expenditure, but I question my right to say that Roscommon was much more reprehensible than his fellows.

But it told upon him, as it did upon all whom the spirit of the murdered Concho brooded, — upon all whom Avarice alternately flattered and tortured. From his quiet gains in his legitimate business, from the little capital accumulated through industry and economy, he lavished thousands on this chimera of his fancy. He grew grizzled and worn over his self-imposed delusion; he no longer jested with his customers, regardless of quality or station or importance; he had cliques to mollify, enemies to placate, friends to reward. The grocery suffered; through giving food and lodgment to clouds of unimpeachable witnesses before the Land Commission and the District Court, "Mrs. Ros." found herself losing money. Even the bar failed; there was a party of Blue Mass employees who drank at the

opposite fonda and cursed the Roscommon claim over the liquor. The calm, mechanical indifference with which Roscommon had served his customers was gone. The towel was no longer used after its perfunctory fashion; the counter remained unwiped; the disks of countless glasses marked its surface, and indicated other preoccupation on the part of the proprietor. The keen gray eye of the claimant of the Red Rock Rancho was always on the look-out for friend or enemy.

Garcia comes next: that gentleman's inborn talent for historic misrepresentation culminated unpleasantly through a defective memory; a year or two after he had sworn in his application for the Rancho, being engaged in another case, some trifling inconsistency was discovered in his statements, which had the effect of throwing the weight of evidence to the party who had paid him most, but was instantly detected by the weaker party. Garcia's preëminence as a witness, an expert and general historian, began to decline. He was obliged to be corroborated, and this required a liberal outlay of his fee. With the loss of his credibility as a witness, bad habits supervened. He was frequently drunk, he lost his position, he lost his house, and Carmen removed to San Francisco, supported him with her brush.

And this brings us once more to that pretty painter and innocent forger, whose unconscious act bore such baleful fruit on the barren hillsides of the Red Rock Rancho, and also to a later blossom of her life, that opened, however, in kindlier sunshine.

IX

WHAT THE FAIR HAD TO DO ABOUT IT

The house that Royal Thatcher so informally quitted in his exodus to the promised land of Biggs was one of those over-sized, under-calculated dwellings conceived and erected in the extravagance of the San Francisco builder's hopes, and occupied finally to his despair. Intended originally as the palace of some inchoate Californian Aladdin, it usually ended as a lodging-house in which some helpless widow, or hopeless spinster, managed to combine respectability with the hard task of bread-getting. Thatcher's landlady was one of the former class. She had unfortunately survived not only her husband, but his property, and, living in some deserted chamber, had, after the fashion of the Italian nobility, let out the rest of the ruin. A tendency to dwell upon these facts gave her conversation a peculiar significance on the first of each month. Thatcher had noticed this with the sensitiveness of an impoverished gentleman. But when, a few days after her lodger's sudden disappearance, a note came from him containing a draft in noble excess of all arrears and charges, the widow's heart was lifted, and the rock smitten with the golden wand gushed beneficence, that shone in a new gown for the widow and a new suit for "Johnny," her son, a new oilcloth in the hall, better service to the lodgers, and, let us be thankful, a kindlier consideration for the poor little black-eyed painter from Monterey, then dreadfully behind in her room rent. For, to tell the truth, the calls upon Miss de Haro's scant purse by her uncle had lately been frequent, perjury having declined in the Monterey market, through excessive and injudicious supply, until the line of demarcation between it and absolute verity was so finely

drawn that Victor Garcia had remarked that "he might as well tell the truth at once and save his soul, since the devil was in the market!"

Mistress Plodgitt, the landlady, could not resist the desire to acquaint Carmen de Haro with her good fortune. "He was always a friend of yours, my dear,—and I know him to be a gentleman that would never let a poor widow suffer,—and see what he says about you!" Here she produced Thatcher's note and read: "Tell my little neighbor that I shall come back soon to carry her and her sketching-tools off by force, and I shall not let her return until she has caught the black mountains and the red rocks she used to talk about, and put the Blue Mass Mill in the foreground of the picture I shall order."

What is this, little one? Surely, Carmen, thou needst not blush at this, thy first grand offer. Holy Virgin! is it of a necessity that thou shouldst stick the wrong end of thy brush in thy mouth, and then drop it in thy lap? Or was it taught thee by the good Sisters at the convent to stride in that boyish fashion to the side of thy elders and snatch from their hands the missive thou wouldst read? More of this we would know, O Carmen, smallest of brunettes. Speak, little one, even in thine own melodious speech, that I may commend thee and thy rare discretion to my own fair countrywomen.

Alas! neither the present chronicler nor Mistress Plodgitt got any further information from the prudent Carmen, and must fain speculate upon certain facts that were already known.

Mistress Carmen's little room was opposite to Thatcher's, and once or twice, the doors being open, Thatcher had a glimpse across the passage of a black-haired head and a sturdy, boyish little figure in a great blue apron, perched on a stool before an easel; and, on the other hand, Carmen had often been conscious of the fumes of a tobacco pipe

penetrating her cloistered seclusion, and had seen across the passage, vaguely enveloped in the same nicotine cloud, an American Olympian, in a rocking-chair, with his feet on the mantel-shelf. They had once or twice met on the staircase, on which occasion Thatcher had greeted her with a word or two of respectful yet half-humorous courtesy, — a courtesy which never really offends a true woman, although it often piques her self-aplomb by the slight assumption of superiority in the humorist. A woman is quick to recognize the fact that the great and more dangerous passions are always *serious*, and may be excused if in self-respect she is often induced to try if there be not somewhere under the skin of this laughing Mercutio the flesh and blood of a Romeo. Thatcher was by nature a defender and protector; weakness, and weakness alone, stirred the depths of his tenderness, — often, I fear, only through its half-humorous aspects, — and on this plane he was pleased to place women and children. I mention this fact for the benefit of the more youthful members of my species, and am satisfied that an unconditional surrender, and the complete laying down at the feet of Beauty of all strong masculinity, is a cheap Gallicism that is untranslatable to most women worthy the winning. For a woman *must* always look up to the man she truly loves, — even if she has to go down on her knees to do it.

Only the masculine reader will infer from this that Carmen was in love with Thatcher; the more critical and analytical feminine eye will see nothing herein that might not have happened consistently with friendship. For Thatcher was no sentimentalist; he had hardly paid a compliment to the girl, — even in the unspoken but most delicate form of attention. There were days when his room door was closed; there were days succeeding these blanks when he met her as frankly and naturally as if he had seen her yesterday. Indeed, on those days following

his flight the simple-minded Carmen, being aware — Heaven knows how — that he had not opened his door during that period, and fearing sickness, sudden death, or perhaps suicide, by her appeals to the landlady assisted unwittingly in discovering his flight and defection. As she was for a few moments as indignant as Mrs. Plodgitt, it is evident that she had but little sympathy with the delinquent. And besides, hitherto she had known only Concho — her earliest friend — and was true to his memory, as against all Americanos, whom she firmly believed to be his murderers.

So she dismissed the offer and the man from her mind, and went back to her painting, — a fancy portrait of the good Padre Junipero Serra, a great missionary, who, haply for the integrity of his bones and character, died some hundred years before the Americans took possession of California. The picture was fair but unsalable, and she began to think seriously of sign-painting, which was then much more popular and marketable. An unfinished head of San Juan de Bautista, artificially framed in clouds, she disposed of to a prominent druggist for $50, where it did good service as exhibiting the effect of four bottles of "Jones' Freckle Eradicator," and in a pleasant and unobtrusive way revived the memory of the saint. Still she felt weary and was growing despondent, and had a longing for the good Sisters and the blameless lethargy of conventual life, and then —

He came!

But not as the Prince should come, on a white charger, to carry away this cruelly abused and enchanted damsel. He was sunburned; he was bearded "like the pard;" he was a little careless as to his dress, and preoccupied in his ways. But his mouth and eyes were the same, and, when he repeated in his old frank, half-mischievous way the invitation of his letter, poor little Carmen could only hesitate and blush.

A thought struck him and sent the color to his face. Your gentleman born is always as modest as a woman. He ran downstairs, and, seizing the widowed Plodgitt, said hastily;—

"You 're just killing yourself here. Take a change. Come down to Monterey for a day or two with me, and bring Miss De Haro with you for company."

The old lady recognized the situation. Thatcher was now a man of vast possibilities. In all maternal daughters of Eve there is the slightest bit of the chaperone and match-maker. It is the last way of reviving the past.

She consented, and Carmen De Haro could not well refuse.

The ladies found the Blue Mass Mills very much as Thatcher had previously described it to them,— "a trifle rough and mannish." But he made over to them the one tenement reserved for himself and slept with his men, or more likely under the trees. At first Mrs. Plodgitt missed gas and running water, and the several conveniences of civilization, among which I fear may be mentioned sheets and pillow-cases; but the balsam of the mountain air soothed her neuralgia and her temper. As for Carmen, she rioted in the unlimited license of her absolute freedom from conventional restraint and the indulgence of her childlike impulses. She scoured the ledges far and wide alone; she dipped into dark copses and scrambled over sterile patches of chimisal, and came back laden with the spoil of buckeye blossoms, manzanita berries, and laurel. But she would not make a sketch of the Blue Mass Company's mills on a Mercator's projection; something that could be afterwards lithographed or chromoed; with the mills turning out tons of quicksilver through the energies of a happy and picturesque assemblage of miners,— even to please her padrone, Don Royal Thatcher. On the contrary, she made a study of the ruins of the crumbled and decayed Red Rock furnace,

with the black mountain above it, and the light of a dying camp-fire shining upon it and the dull red excavations in the ledge. But even this did not satisfy her until she had made some alterations, and when she finally brought her finished study to Don Royal she looked at him a little defiantly.

Thatcher admired honestly, and then criticised a little humorously and dishonestly.

"But could n't you, for a consideration, put up a sign-board on that rock with the inscription, 'Road to the Blue Mass Company's new mills to the right,' and combine business with art? That 's the fault of you geniuses. But what 's this blanketed figure doing here, lying before the furnace? You never saw one of my miners there — and a Mexican, too, by his serape!"

"That," quoth Mistress Carmen coolly, "was put in to fill up the foreground; I wanted something there to balance the picture."

"But," continued Thatcher, dropping into unconscious admiration again, "it 's drawn to the life. Tell me, Miss De Haro, before I ask the aid and counsel of Mrs. Plodgitt, who is my hated rival and your lay figure and model?"

"Oh," said Carmen, with a little sigh, "it 's only poor Concho."

"And where is Concho?" (a little impatiently).

"He 's dead, Don Royal."

"Dead?"

"Of a verity — very dead — murdered here by your countrymen."

"I see — and you knew him?"

"He was my friend."

"Oh!"

"Truly."

"But" (wickedly), "is n't this a rather ghastly adver-

tisement — outside of an illustrated newspaper — of my property ?"

"Ghastly, Don Royal ? Look you, he sleeps."

"Ay" (in Spanish), "as the dead."

Carmen (crossing herself hastily): "After the fashion of the dead."

They were both feeling uncomfortable. Carmen was shivering. But, being a woman and tactful, she recovered her head first. "It is a study for myself, Don Royal; I shall make to you another." And she slipped away, as she thought, out of the subject and his presence.

But she was mistaken: in the evening he renewed the conversation. Carmen began to fence, not from cowardice or deceit, as the masculine reader would readily infer, but from some wonderful feminine instinct that told her to be cautious. But he got from her the fact, to him before unknown, that she was the niece of his main antagonist, and, being a gentleman, so redoubled his attentions and his courtesy that Mrs. Plodgitt made up her mind that it was a foregone conclusion, and seriously reflected as to what she should wear on the momentous occasion. But that night poor Carmen cried herself to sleep, resolving that she would hereafter cast aside her wicked uncle for this good-hearted Americano, yet never once connected her innocent penmanship with the deadly feud between them. Women — the best of them — are strong as to collateral facts, swift of deduction, but vague as children are to the exact statement or recognition of premises. It is hardly necessary to say that Carmen had never thought of connecting any act of hers with the claims of her uncle, and the circumstance of the signature she had totally forgotten.

The masculine reader will now understand Carmen's confusion and blushes, and believe himself an ass to have thought them a confession of original affection. The feminine reader will, by this time, become satisfied that the

deceitful minx's sole idea was to gain the affections of Thatcher. And really I don't know who is right.

Nevertheless she painted a sketch for Thatcher, — which now adorns the Company's office in San Francisco, — in which the property is laid out in pleasing geometrical lines, and the rosy promise of the future instinct in every touch of the brush. Then, having earned her "wage," as she believed, she became somewhat cold and shy to Thatcher. Whereat that gentlemen redoubled his attentions, seeing only in her presence a certain *méprise*, which concerned her more than himself. The niece of his enemy meant nothing more to him than an interesting girl, — to be protected always, — to be feared never. But even suspicion may be insidiously placed in noble minds.

Mistress Plodgitt, thus early estopped of match-making, of course put the blame on her own sex, and went over to the stronger side, — the man's.

"It 's a great pity gals should be so curious," she said, *sotto voce*, to Thatcher, when Carmen was in one of her sullen moods. "Yet I s'pose it 's in her blood. Them Spaniards is always revengeful, — like the Eyetalians."

Thatcher honestly looked his surprise.

"Why, don't you see, she 's thinking how all these lands might have been her uncle's but for you. And, instead of trying to be sweet and" — Here she stopped to cough.

"Good God!" said Thatcher in great concern, "I never thought of that." He stopped for a moment and then added with decision, "I can't believe it; it is n't like her."

Mrs. P. was piqued. She walked away, delivering, however, this Parthian arrow: "Well, I hope *'t ain't nothing worse.*"

Thatcher chuckled, then felt uneasy. When he next met Carmen she found his gray eyes fixed on hers with a curious, half-inquisitorial look she had never noticed before. This only added fuel to the fire. Forgetting their relations

of host and guest, she was absolutely rude. Thatcher was quiet but watchful; got the Plodgitt to bed early, and, under cover of showing a moonlight view of the "Lost Chance Mill," decoyed Carmen out of ear-shot as far as the dismantled furnace.

"What is the matter, Miss De Haro? have I offended you?"

Miss Carmen was not aware that anything was the matter. If Don Royal preferred old friends, whose loyalty of course he knew, *who were above speaking ill against a gentleman in his adversity* — (O Carmen! fie!) if he preferred *their* company to *later friends* — why — (the masculine reader will observe this tremendous climax and tremble) — why she did n't know why *he* should blame *her*.

They turned and faced each other. The conditions for a perfect misunderstanding could not have been better arranged between two people. Thatcher was a masculine reasoner; Carmen, a feminine feeler, — if I may be pardoned the expression. Thatcher wanted to get at certain facts, and argue therefrom. Carmen wanted to get at certain feelings, and then fit the facts to them.

"But I am *not* blaming you, Miss Carmen," he said gravely. "It *was* stupid in me to confront you here with the property claimed by your uncle and occupied by me, but it was a mistake, — no!" he added hastily, — "it was not a mistake. You knew it and I did n't. You overlooked it before you came, and I was too glad to overlook it after you were here."

"Of course," said Carmen, pettishly, "I am the only one to be blamed. It 's like you *men!*" (Mem. She was just fifteen, and uttered this awful *résumé* of experience just as if it had n't been taught to her in her cradle.)

Feminine generalities always stagger a man. Thatcher said nothing. Carmen became more enraged.

"Why did you want to take Uncle Victor's property, then?" she asked triumphantly.

"I don't know that it is your uncle's property."

"You — don't — know? Have you seen the application with Governor Micheltorena's indorsement? Have you heard the witnesses?" she said passionately.

"Signatures may be forged and witnesses lie," said Thatcher, quietly.

"What is it you call 'forged'?"

Thatcher instantly recalled the fact that the Spanish language held no synonyme for "forgery." The act was apparently an invention of *El Diable Americano*. So he said, with a slight smile in his kindly eyes: —

"Anybody wicked enough and dexterous enough can imitate another's handwriting. When this is used to benefit fraud we call it 'forgery.' I beg your pardon — Miss De Haro, Miss Carmen — what is the matter?"

She had suddenly lapsed against a tree, quite helpless, nerveless, and with staring eyes fixed on his. As yet an embryo woman, inexperienced and ignorant, the sex's instinct was potential; she had in one plunge fathomed all that his reason had been years groping for.

Thatcher saw only that she was pained, that she was helpless; that was enough. "It is possible that your uncle may have been deceived," he began; "many honest men have been fooled by clever but deceitful tricksters, men and women" —

"Stop! *Madre de Dios!* WILL YOU STOP?"

Thatcher for an instant recoiled from the flashing eyes and white face of the little figure that had, with menacing and clenched baby fingers, strode to his side. He stopped.

"Where is this application — this forgery?" she asked. "Show it to me!"

Thatcher felt relieved, and smiled the superior smile of our sex over feminine ignorance. "You could hardly expect me to be trusted with your uncle's vouchers. His papers, of course, are in the hands of his counsel."

"And when can I leave this place?" she asked, passionately.

"If you consult my wishes you will stay, if only long enough to forgive me. But if I have offended you, unknowingly, and you are implacable" —

"I can go to-morrow, at sunrise, if I like?"

"As you will," returned Thatcher, gravely.

"Gracias, Señor."

They walked slowly back to the house, — Thatcher with a masculine sense of being unreasonably afflicted, Carmen with a woman's instinct of being hopelessly crushed. No word was spoken until they reached the door. Then Carmen suddenly, in her old impulsive way, and in a childlike treble, sang out merrily, "Good-night, O Don Royal, and pleasant dreams. *Hasta Mañana.*"

Thatcher stood dumb and astonished at this capricious girl. She saw his mystification instantly. "It is for the old Cat!" she whispered, jerking her thumb over her shoulder in the direction of the sleeping Mrs. P. "Good-night — go!"

He went to give orders for a *peon* to attend the ladies and their equipage the next day. He awoke to find Miss De Haro gone, with her escort, towards Monterey. And without the Plodgitt.

He could not conceal his surprise from the latter lady. She, left alone, — a not altogether unavailable victim to the wiles of our sex, — was embarrassed. But not so much that she could not say to Thatcher: "I told you so, — gone to her uncle . . . To tell him *all!*"

"All? D—n it! *what* can she tell him?" roared Thatcher, stung out of his self-control.

"Nothing, I hope, that she should not," said Mrs. P., and chastely retired.

She was right. Miss Carmen posted to Monterey, running her horse nearly off its legs to do it, and then sent

back her beast and escort, saying she would rejoin Mrs. Plodgitt by steamer at San Francisco. Then she went boldly to the law office of Saponaceous Wood, District Attorney and whilom solicitor of her uncle.

With the majority of masculine Monterey, Miss Carmen was known and respectfully admired, despite the infelix reputation of her kinsman. Mr. Wood was glad to see her, and awkwardly gallant. Miss Carmen was cool and business-like; she had come from her uncle to "regard" the papers in the Red Rock Rancho case. They were instantly produced. Carmen turned to the application for the grant. Her cheek paled slightly. With her clear memory and wonderful fidelity of perception, she could not be mistaken. *The signature of Micheltorena was in her own handwriting!*

Yet she looked up to the lawyer with a smile: "May I take these papers for an hour to my uncle?"

Even an older and better man than the District Attorney could not have resisted those drooping lids and that gentle voice.

"Certainly."

"I will return them in an hour."

She was as good as her word, and within the hour dropped the papers and a little courtesy to her uncle's legal advocate, and that night took the steamer to San Francisco.

The next morning Victor Garcia, a little the worse for the previous night's dissipation, reeled into Wood's office. "I have fears for my niece, Carmen. She is with the enemy," he said thickly. "Look you at this."

It was an anonymous letter (in Mrs. Plodgitt's own awkward fist), advising him of the fact that his niece was bought by the enemy, and cautioning him against her.

"Impossible," said the lawyer, "it was only last week she sent thee $50."

Victor blushed, even through his ensanguined cheeks, and made an impatient gesture with his hand.

"Besides," added the lawyer coolly, "she has been here to examine the papers at thy request, and returned them of yesterday."

Victor gasped — "And — you — you — gave them to her?"

"Of course!"

"All? Even the application and the signature?"

"Certainly! — you sent her."

"Sent her? The devil's own daughter!" shrieked Garcia. "No! A hundred million times, no! Quick, before it is too late. Give to me the papers."

Mr. Wood reproduced the file. Garcia ran over it with trembling fingers, until at last he clutched the fateful document. Not content with opening it and glancing at its text and signature, he took it to the window.

"It is the same," he muttered with a sigh of relief.

"Of course it is," said Mr. Wood sharply. "The papers are all there. You 're a fool, Victor Garcia!"

And so he was. And, for the matter of that, so was Mr. Saponaceous Wood, of counsel.

Meanwhile Miss De Haro returned to San Francisco and resumed her work. A day or two later she was joined by her landlady. Mrs. P. had too large a nature to permit an anonymous letter, written by her own hand, to stand between her and her demeanor to her little lodger. So she coddled her and flattered her, and depicted in slightly exaggerated colors the grief of Don Royal at her sudden departure. All of which Miss Carmen received in a demure, kitten-like way, but still kept quietly at her work. In due time Don Royal's order was completed; still she had leisure and inclination enough to add certain touches to her ghastly sketch of the crumbling furnace.

Nevertheless, as Don Royal did not return, through

excess of business, Mrs. Plodgitt turned an honest penny by letting his room, temporarily, to two quiet Mexicans, who, but for a beastly habit of cigarrito-smoking which tainted the whole house, were fair enough lodgers. If they failed in making the acquaintance of this fair countrywoman, Miss De Haro, it was through that lady's preoccupation in her over-work, and not through their ostentatious endeavors.

"Miss De Haro is peculiar," explained the politic Mrs. P. to her guests; "she makes no acquaintances, which I consider bad for her business. If it had not been for me she would not have known Royal Thatcher, the great quicksilver miner, — and had his order for a picture of his mine!"

The two foreign gentlemen exchanged glances. One said, "Ah, God! this is bad," and the other, "It is not possible!" and then, when the landlady's back was turned, introduced themselves with a skeleton key into the then vacant bedroom and studio of their fair countrywoman, who was absent sketching. "Thou observest," said Mr. Pedro, refugee, to Miguel, ex-ecclesiastic, "that this Americano is all-powerful, and that this Victor, drunkard as he is, is right in his suspicions."

"Of a verity, yes," replied Miguel, "thou dost remember it was Jovita Castro who, for her Americano lover, betrayed the Sobriente claim. It is only with us, my Pedro, that Mexican spirit, the real God and Liberty, yet lives!"

They shook hands nobly and with sentimental fervor, and then went to work, *i. e.* the rummaging over of the trunks, drawers, and portmanteaus of the poor little painter, Carmen De Haro, and even ripped up the mattress of her virginal cot. But they found not what they sought.

"What is that yonder on the easel, covered with a cloth?" said Miguel; "it is a trick of these artists to put their valuables together."

Pedro strode to the easel and tore away the muslin curtain that veiled it; then uttered a shriek that appalled his comrade and brought him to his side.

"In the name of God," said Miguel hastily, "are you trying to alarm the house?"

The ex-vaquero was trembling like a child. "Look," he said hoarsely, "look, do you see? It is the hand of God," and fainted on the floor!

Miguel looked. It was Carmen's partly finished sketch of the deserted furnace. The figure of Concho, thrown out strongly by the camp-fire, occupied the left foreground. But to balance her picture she had evidently been obliged to introduce another, — the face and figure of Pedro, on all-fours, creeping toward the sleeping man.

X

WHO LOBBIED FOR IT

It was a midsummer's day in Washington. Even at early morning, while the sun was yet level with the faces of pedestrians in its broad, shadeless avenues, it was insufferably hot. Later the avenues themselves shone like the diverging rays of another sun, — the Capitol, — a thing to be feared by the naked eye. Later yet it grew hotter, and then a mist arose from the Potomac, and blotted out the blazing arch above, and presently piled up along the horizon delusive thunder-clouds, that spent their strength and substance elsewhere and left it hotter than before. Towards evening the sun came out invigorated, having cleared the heavenly brow of perspiration, but leaving its fever unabated.

The city was deserted. The few who remained apparently buried themselves from the garish light of day in some dim cloistered recess of shop, hotel, or restaurant; and the

perspiring stranger, dazed by the outer glare, who broke in upon their quiet, sequestered repose, confronted collarless and coatless spectres of the past with fans in their hands, who, after dreamily going through some perfunctory business, immediately retired to sleep after the stranger had gone. Congressmen and Senators had long since returned to their several constituencies with the various information that the country was going to ruin, or that the outlook never was more hopeful and cheering, as the tastes of their constituency indicated. A few Cabinet officers still lingered, having by this time become convinced that they could do nothing their own way, or indeed in any way but the old way, and getting gloomily resigned to their situation. A body of learned, cultivated men, representing the highest legal tribunal in the land, still lingered in a vague idea of earning the scant salary bestowed upon them by the economical founders of the Government, and listened patiently to the arguments of Counsel, whose fees for advocacy of claims before them would have paid the life income of half the bench. There was Mr. Attorney-General and his assistants still protecting the Government's millions from rapacious hands, and drawing the yearly public pittance that their wealthier private antagonists would have scarce given as a retainer to their junior counsel; and the little standing army of departmental employees, the helpless victims of the most senseless and idiotic form of discipline the world has known — a discipline so made up of Caprice, Expediency, Cowardice, and Tyranny that its reform meant Revolution, not to be tolerated by legislators and lawgivers, or a Despotism in which half a dozen accidentally chosen men interpreted their prejudices or preferences as being that Reform. Administration after Administration and Party after Party had persisted in their desperate attempts to fit the youthful colonial garments, made by our fathers after bygone fashion, over the expanded limits and generous outline of a

matured nation. There were patches here and there, there were grievous rents and holes here and there, there were ludicrous and painful exposures of growing limbs everywhere, and the Party in Power and the Party out of Power could do nothing but mend and patch, and revamp and cleanse and scour, and occasionally, in the wildness of despair, suggest even the cutting off the rebellious limbs that persisted in growing beyond the swaddling clothes of its infancy.

It was a capital of Contradictions and Inconsistences. At one end of the Avenue sat the responsible High Keeper of the Military Honor, Valor, and Warlike Prestige of a Great Nation, without the power to pay his own troops their legal dues until some selfish quarrel between Party and Party was settled. Hard by sat another secretary, whose established functions seemed to be the misrepresentation of the nation abroad by the least characteristic of its classes — the politicians — and only then when they had been defeated as politicians, and when their constituents had declared them no longer worthy to be even *their* representatives. This National Absurdity was only equaled by another, wherein an Ex-Politician was for four years expected to uphold the honor of a flag of a great nation over an ocean he had never tempted, with a discipline the rudiments of which he could scarcely acquire before he was removed, or his term of office expired, receiving his orders from a superior officer as ignorant of his special duties as himself, and subjected to the revision of a Congress cognizant of him only as a politician. At the further end of the Avenue was another department, so vast in its extent and so varied in its functions that few of the really Great Practical Workers of the land would have accepted its responsibility for ten times its salary, but which the most perfect Constitution in the World handed over to men who were obliged to make it a stepping-stone to future preferment. There was another department, more suggestive of its finan-

cial functions from the occasional extravagances or economies exhibited in its pay-rolls, — successive Congresses having taken other matters out of its hands, — presided over by an official who bore the title and responsibility of the Custodian and Disburser of the Nation's Purse, and received a salary that a bank president would have sniffed at. For it was part of this Constitutional Inconsistency and Administrative Absurdity that in the matter of Honor, Justice, Fidelity to Trust, and even Business Integrity, the official was always expected to be the superior of the Government he represented. Yet the crowning Inconsistency was that, from time to time, it was submitted to the sovereign people to declare if these various Inconsistencies were not really the perfect expression of the most perfect Government the world had known. And it is to be recorded that the unanimous voices of Representative, Orator, and Unfettered Poetry were that it was.

Even the public press lent itself to the Great Inconsistency. It was as clear as crystal to the journal on one side of the Avenue that the country was going to the dogs unless the *spirit* of the fathers once more reanimated the public; it was equally clear to the journal on the other side of the Avenue that only a rigid adherence to the *letter* of the fathers would save the nation from decline. It was obvious to the first-named journal that the "letter" meant Government patronage to the other journal; it was potent to that journal that the "shekels" of Senator X. really animated the spirit of the fathers. Yet all agreed it was a great and good and perfect government, — subject only to the predatory incursions of a hydra-headed monster known as a "Ring." The Ring's origin was wrapped in secrecy, its fecundity was alarming; but although its rapacity was preternatural, its digestion was perfect and easy. It circumvolved all affairs in an atmosphere of mystery; it clouded all things with the dust and ashes of distrust. All

disappointment of place, of avarice, of incompetency, or ambition was clearly attributable to it. It even permeated private and social life: there were Rings in our kitchen and household service; in our public schools, that kept the active intelligences of our children passive; there were Rings of engaging, handsome, dissolute young fellows, who kept us moral but unengaging seniors from the favors of the Fair; there were subtle, conspiring Rings among our creditors, which sent us into bankruptcy and restricted our credit. In fact, it would not be hazardous to say that all that was calamitous in public and private experience was clearly traceable to that combination of power in a minority over weakness in a majority — known as a "Ring."

Haply there was a body of demigods, as yet uninvoked, who should speedily settle all that. When Smith of Minnesota, Robinson of Vermont, and Jones of Georgia returned to Congress from those rural seclusions, so potent with information and so freed from local prejudices, it was understood, vaguely, that great things would be done. This was always understood. There never was a time in the history of American politics when, to use the expression of the journals before alluded to, "the present session of Congress" did not "bid fair to be the most momentous in our history," and did not, as far as the facts go, leave a vast amount of unfinished important business lying hopelessly upon its desks, having "bolted" the rest as rashly and with as little regard to digestion or assimilation as the American traveler has for his railway refreshment.

In this capital, on this languid midsummer day, in an upper room of one of its second-rate hotels, the Honorable Mr. Pratt C. Gashwiler sat at his writing-table. There are certain large, fleshy men with whom the omission of even a necktie or collar has all the effect of an indecent

exposure. The Honorable Mr. Gashwiler, in his trousers and shirt, was a sight to be avoided by the modest eye. There were such palpable suggestions of vast extents of unctuous flesh in the slight glimpse offered by his open throat, that his dishabille should have been as private as his business. Nevertheless, when there was a knock at his door he unhesitatingly said, "Come in!" — pushing away a goblet crowned with a certain aromatic herb with his right hand, while he drew towards him with his left a few proof-slips of his forthcoming speech. The Gashwiler brow became, as it were, intelligently abstracted.

The intruder regarded Gashwiler with a glance of familiar recognition from his right eye, while his left took in a rapid survey of the papers on the table, and gleamed sardonically.

"You are at work, I see," he said apologetically.

"Yes," replied the Congressman, with an air of perfunctory weariness — "one of my speeches. Those d—d printers make such a mess of it, I suppose I don't write a very fine hand."

If the gifted Gashwiler had added that he did not write a very intelligent hand, or a very grammatical hand, and that his spelling was faulty, he would have been truthful, although the copy and proof before him might not have borne him out. The near fact was, that the speech was composed and written by one Expectant Dobbs, a poor retainer of Gashwiler, and the honorable member's labor as a proof-reader was confined to the introduction of such words as "Anarchy," "Oligarchy," "Satrap," "Palladium," and "Argus-eyed," in the proof, with little relevancy as to position or place, and no perceptible effect as to argument.

The stranger saw all this with his wicked left eye, but continued to beam mildly with his right. Removing the coat and waistcoat of Gashwiler from a chair, he drew it

towards the table, pushing aside a portly, loud-ticking watch — the very image of Gashwiler — that lay beside him, and resting his elbows on the proofs, said: —

"Well?"

"Have you anything new?" asked the Parliamentary Gashwiler.

"Much! a woman!" replied the stranger.

The astute Gashwiler, waiting further information, concluded to receive this fact gayly and gallantly. "A woman? — my dear Mr. Wiles — of course! The dear creatures," he continued, with a fat, offensive chuckle, "somehow are always making their charming presence felt. Ha! ha! A man, sir, in public life becomes accustomed to that sort of thing, and knows when he must be agreeable — agreeable, sir, but firm! I've had my experience, sir — my *own* experience," — and the Congressman leaned back in his chair, not unlike a robust St. Anthony, who had withstood one temptation to thrive on another.

"Yes," said Wiles impatiently, "but d—n it, she's on the *other side.*"

"The other side!" repeated Gashwiler vacantly.

"Yes. She's a niece of Garcia's. A little she-devil."

"But Garcia is on our side," rejoined Gashwiler.

"Yes; but she is bought by the Ring."

"A woman," sneered Mr. Gashwiler; "what can she do with men who won't be made fools of? Is she so handsome?"

"I never saw any great beauty in her," said Wiles shortly, "although they say that she's rather caught that d—d Thatcher, in spite of his coldness. At any rate she is his protégée. But she is n't the sort you 're thinking of, Gashwiler. They say she knows or pretends to know something about the grant. She may have got hold of some of her uncle's papers. Those Greasers were always d—d fools, and if he did anything foolish, like as not he bungled or

did n't cover up his tracks. And with his knowledge and facilities, too! Why if I 'd" — but here Mr. Wiles stopped to sigh over the inequality of fortune that wasted opportunities on the less skillful scamp.

Mr. Gashwiler became dignified. "She can do nothing with us," he said potentially.

Wiles turned his wicked eye on him. "Manuel and Miguel, who sold out to our man, *are* afraid of her. They were our witnesses. I verily believe they 'd take back everything if she got after them. And as for Pedro, he thinks she holds the power of life and death over him."

"Pedro! Life and death — what 's all this?" said the astonished Gashwiler.

Wiles saw his blunder, but saw also that he had gone too far to stop. "Pedro," he said, "was strongly suspected of having murdered Concho, one of the original locaters."

Mr. Gashwiler turned white as a sheet, and then flushed again into an apoplectic glow. "Do you dare to say," he began as soon as he could find his tongue and his legs, — for in the exercise of his congressional functions these extreme members supported each other, — "do you mean to say," he stammered in rising rage, "that you have dared to deceive an American lawgiver into legislating upon a measure connected with a capital offense? Do I understand you to say, sir, that murder stands upon the record — stands upon the record, sir — of this cause to which, as a representative of Remus, I have lent my official aid? Do you mean to say that you have deceived my constituency, whose sacred trust I hold, in inveigling me to hiding a crime from the Argus eyes of Justice?" And Mr. Gashwiler looked towards the bell-pull as if about to summon a servant to witness this outrage against the established judiciary.

"The murder, if it *was* a murder, took place before Garcia entered upon this claim or had a footing in this court," returned Wiles blandly, "and is no part of the record."

"You are sure it is not spread upon the record?"

"I am. You can judge for yourself."

Mr. Gashwiler walked to the window, returned to the table, finished his liquor in a single gulp, and then, with a slight resumption of dignity, said: —

"That alters the case."

Wiles glanced with his left eye at the Congressman. The right placidly looked out of the window. Presently he said quietly, "I 've brought you the certificates of stock; do you wish them made out in your own name?"

Mr. Gashwiler tried hard to look as if he were trying to recall the meaning of Wiles' words. "Oh! — ah! — umph! — let me see — Oh, yes, the certificates — certainly! Of course you will make them out in the name of my secretary, Mr. Expectant Dobbs. They will perhaps repay him for the extra clerical labor required in the prosecution of your claim. He is a worthy young man. Although not a public officer, yet he is so near to me that perhaps I am wrong in permitting him to accept a fee for private interests. An American representative cannot be too cautious, Mr. Wiles. Perhaps you had better have also a blank transfer. The stock is, I understand, yet in the future. Mr. Dobbs, though talented and praiseworthy, is poor; he may wish to realize. If some — ahem! some *friend* — better circumstanced should choose to advance the cash to him and run the risk — why it would only be an act of kindness."

"You are proverbially generous, Mr. Gashwiler," said Wiles, opening and shutting his left eye, like a dark lantern, on the benevolent representative.

"Youth, when faithful and painstaking, should be encouraged," replied Mr. Gashwiler. "I lately had occasion to point this out in a few remarks I had to make before the Sabbath-school reunion at Remus. Thank you, I will see that they are — ahem — conveyed to him. I shall give them to him with my own hand," he concluded, falling

back in his chair, as if the better to contemplate the perspective of his own generosity and condescension. Mr. Wiles took his hat and turned to go. Before he reached the door Mr. Gashwiler returned to the social level with a chuckle: —

"You say this woman, this Garcia's niece, is handsome and smart?"

"Yes."

"I can set another woman on the track that'll euchre her every time!"

Mr. Wiles was too clever to appear to notice the sudden lapse in the Congressman's dignity, and only said, with his right eye: —

"Can you?"

"By G—d I *will*, or I don't know how to represent Remus."

Mr. Wiles thanked him with his right eye, looked a dagger with his left. "Good," he said, and added persuasively: "Does she live here?"

The Congressman nodded assent. "An awfully handsome woman — a particular friend of mine!" Mr. Gashwiler here looked as if he would not mind to have been rallied a little over his intimacy with the fair one, but the astute Mr. Wiles was at the same moment making up his mind, after interpreting the Congressman's look and manner, that he must know this fair incognito if he wished to sway Gashwiler. He determined to bide his time.

The door was scarcely closed upon him when another knock diverted Mr. Gashwiler's attention from his proofs. The door opened to a young man with sandy hair and anxious face. He entered the room deprecatingly, as if conscious of the presence of a powerful being, to be supplicated and feared. Mr. Gashwiler did not attempt to disabuse his mind. "Busy, you see," he said shortly, "correcting your work!"

"I hope it is acceptable!" said the young man, timidly.

"Well — yes — it will do," said Gashwiler; "indeed, I may say it is satisfactory on the whole," he added with the appearance of a large generosity, "quite satisfactory."

"You have no news, I suppose?" continued the young man with a slight flush, born of pride or expectation.

"No, nothing as yet." Mr. Gashwiler paused as if a thought had struck him.

"I have thought," he said finally, "that some position — such as a secretaryship with me — would help you to a better appointment. Now, supposing that I make you my private secretary, giving you some important and confidential business. Eh?"

Dobbs looked at his patron with a certain wistful, dog-like expectancy; moved himself excitedly on his chair-seat in a peculiar canine-like anticipation of gratitude, strongly suggesting that he would have wagged his tail if he had had one. At which Mr. Gashwiler became more impressive.

"Indeed, I may say I anticipated it by certain papers I have put in your charge and in your name, only taking from you a transfer — that might enable me to satisfy my conscience hereafter in recommending you as my — ahem — private secretary. Perhaps as a mere form you might now, while you are here, put your name to these transfers, and, so to speak, begin your duties at once."

The glow of pride and hope that mantled the cheek of poor Dobbs might have melted a harder heart than Gashwiler's. But the Senatorial toga had invested Mr. Gashwiler with a more than Roman stoicism towards the feelings of others, and he only fell back in his chair in the pose of conscious rectitude as Dobbs hurriedly signed the paper.

"I shall place them in my portman-tell," said Gashwiler, suiting the word to the action, "for safe-keeping. I need not inform you, who are now, as it were, on the threshold of official life, that perfect and inviolable secrecy in all

affairs of State" — Mr. G. here motioned toward his portmanteau as if it contained a treaty at least — "is most essential and necessary."

Dobbs assented: "Then my duties will keep me with you here?" he asked doubtfully.

"No — no," said Gashwiler, hastily; then, correcting himself, he added: "that is — for the present — no!"

Poor Dobbs' face fell. The near fact was that he had lately had notice to quit his present lodgings in consequence of arrears in his rent, and he had a hopeful reliance that his confidential occupation would carry bread and lodging with it. But he only asked if there were any new papers to make out.

"Ahem! not at present; the fact is that I am obliged to give so much of my time to callers — I have to-day been obliged to see half a dozen — that I must lock myself up and say 'Not at home' for the rest of the day."

Feeling that this was an intimation that the interview was over, the new private secretary, a little dashed as to his near hopes, but still sanguine of the future, humbly took his leave.

But here a certain Providence, perhaps mindful of poor Dobbs, threw into his simple hands — to be used or not, if he were worthy or capable of using it — a certain power and advantage. He had descended the staircase, and was passing through the lower corridor, when he was made the unwilling witness of a remarkable assault.

It appeared that Mr. Wiles, who had quitted Gashwiler's presence as Dobbs was announced, had other business in the hotel, and in pursuance of it had knocked at room No. 90. In response to the gruff voice that bade him enter, Mr. Wiles opened the door and espied the figure of a tall, muscular, fiery-bearded man extended on the bed, with the bed-clothes carefully tucked under his chin and his arms lying flat by his side.

Mr. Wiles beamed with his right cheek, and advanced to the bed as if to take the hand of the stranger, who, however, neither by word nor sign, responded to his salutation.

"Perhaps I 'm intruding?" said Mr. Wiles blandly.

"Perhaps you are," said Red Beard dryly.

Mr. Wiles forced a smile on his right cheek, which he turned to the smiter, but permitted the left to indulge in unlimited malevolence. "I wanted merely to know if you have looked into that matter?" he said meekly.

"I've looked into it and round it, and across it and over it and through it," responded the man gravely, with his eyes fixed on Wiles.

"And you have perused all the papers?" continued Mr. Wiles.

"I've read every paper, every speech, every affidavit, every decision, every argument," said the stranger, as if repeating a formula.

Mr. Wiles attempted to conceal his embarrassment by an easy, right-handed smile, that went off sardonically on the left, and continued, "Then I hope, my dear sir, that, having thoroughly mastered the case, you are inclined to be favorable to us?"

The gentleman in the bed did not reply, but apparently nestled more closely beneath the coverlids.

"I have brought the shares I spoke of," continued Mr. Wiles insinuatingly.

"Hev you a friend within call?" interrupted the recumbent man gently.

"I don't quite understand!" smiled Mr. Wiles. "Of course any name you might suggest" —

"Hev you a friend — any chap that you might waltz in here at a moment's call?" continued the man in bed. "No? Do you know any of them waiters in the house? Thar 's a bell over yan!" and he motioned with his eyes towards the wall, but did not otherwise move his body.

"No," said Wiles, becoming slightly suspicious and wrathful.

"Mebbe a stranger might do? I reckon thar's one passin' in the hall. Call him in — he 'll do!"

Wiles opened the door a little impatiently, yet inquisitively, as Dobbs passed. The man in bed called out, "Oh, stranger?" and, as Dobbs stopped, said "Come 'yar."

Dobbs entered a little timidly, as was his habit with strangers.

"I don't know who you be — nor care, I reckon," said the stranger. "This yer man" — pointing to Wiles — "is Wiles. I'm Josh Sibblee of Fresno, Member of Congress from the 4th Congressional District of Californy. I'm jist lying here, with a derringer into each hand — jist lying here kivered up and holdin' in on'y to keep from blowin' the top o' this d—d skunk's head off. I kinder feel I can't hold in any longer. What I want to say to ye, stranger, is that this yer skunk — which his name is Wiles — hez bin tryin' his d—dest to get a bribe onto Josh, and Josh, out o' respect for his constituents, is jist waitin' for some stranger to waltz in and stop the d—dest fight" —

"But, my dear Mr. Sibblee, there must be some mistake," said Wiles earnestly.

"Mistake? Strip me!"

"No! no!" said Wiles hurriedly, as the simple-minded Dobbs was about to draw down the coverlid.

"Take him away," said the Honorable Mr. Sibblee, "before I disgrace my constituency. They said I'd be in jail 'afore I get through the session. Ef you 've got any humanity, stranger, snake him out, and pow'ful quick, too."

Dobbs, quite white and aghast, looked at Wiles and hesitated. There was a slight movement in the bed. Both men started for the door, and the next minute it closed very decidedly on the member from Fresno.

XI

HOW IT WAS LOBBIED FOR

The Honorable Pratt C. Gashwiler, M. C., was of course unaware of the incident described in the last chapter. His secret, even if it had been discovered by Dobbs, was safe in that gentleman's innocent and honorable hands, and certainly was not of a quality that Mr. Wiles, at present, would have cared to expose. For, in spite of Mr. Wiles' discomfiture, he still had enough experience of character to know that the irate member from Fresno would be satisfied with his own peculiar manner of vindicating his own personal integrity, and would not make a public scandal of it. Again, Wiles was convinced that Dobbs was equally implicated with Gashwiler, and would be silent for his own sake. So that poor Dobbs, as is too often the fate of simple but weak natures, had full credit for duplicity by every rascal in the land.

From which it may be inferred that nothing occurred to disturb the security of Gashwiler. When the door closed upon Mr. Wiles, he indited a note, which with a costly but exceedingly distasteful bouquet — rearranged by his own fat fingers, and discord and incongruity visible in every combination of color — he sent off by a special messenger. Then he proceeded to make his toilet, — an operation rarely graceful or picturesque in our sex, and an insult to the spectator when obesity is superadded. When he had put on a clean shirt, of which there was grossly too much, and added a white waistcoat, that seemed to accent his rotundity, he completed his attire with a black frock coat of the latest style, and surveyed himself complacently before a mirror. It is to be recorded that, however satisfactory the result may have been to Mr. Gashwiler, it was not so to

the disinterested spectator. There are some men on whom "that deformed thief, Fashion," avenges himself by making their clothes appear perennially new. The gloss of the tailor's iron never disappears; the creases of the shelf perpetually rise in judgment against the wearer. Novelty was the general suggestion of Mr. Gashwiler's full dress — it was never his habitude — and "Our own Make," "Nobby," and the "Latest Style, only $15," was as patent on the legislator's broad back as if it still retained the shopman's ticket.

Thus arrayed, within an hour he complacently followed the note and his floral offering. The house he sought had been once the residence of a foreign ambassador, who had loyally represented his government in a single unimportant treaty, now forgotten, and in various receptions and dinners, still actively remembered by occasional visitors to its salôn, now the average dreary American parlor. "Dear me," the fascinating Mr. X. would say, "but do you know, love, in this very room I remember meeting the distinguished Marquis of Monte Pio," or perhaps the fashionable Jones of the State Department instantly crushed the decayed friend he was perfunctorily visiting, by saying, "'Pon my soul, *you* here! — why, the last time I was in this room I gossiped for an hour with the Countess de Castenet in that very corner." For with the recall of the aforesaid Ambassador the mansion had become a boarding-house, kept by the wife of a departmental clerk.

Perhaps there was nothing in the history of the house more quaint and philosophic than the story of its present occupant. Rogar Fauquier had been a departmental clerk for forty years. It was at once his practical good luck and his misfortune to have been early appointed to a position which required a thorough and complete knowledge of the formulas and routine of a department that expended millions of the public funds. Fauquier, on a poor salary,

diminishing instead of increasing with his service, had seen successive Administrations bud and blossom and decay, but had kept his position through the fact that his knowledge was a necessity to the successive chiefs and employees. Once it was true that he had been summarily removed by a new Secretary, to make room for a camp-follower, whose exhaustive and intellectual services in a political campaign had made him eminently fit for anything, but the alarming discovery that the new clerk's knowledge of grammar and etymology was even worse than that of the Secretary himself, and that, through ignorance of detail, the business of that department was retarded to a damage to the Government of over half a million of dollars, led to the reinstatement of Mr. Fauquier — *at a lower salary.* For it was felt that something was wrong somewhere, and, as it had always been the custom of Congress and the Administration to cut down salaries as the first step to reform, they made of Mr. Fauquier a moral example. A gentleman born, of somewhat expensive tastes, having lived up to his former salary, this change brought another bread-winner into the field, Mrs. Fauquier, who tried, more or less unsuccessfully, to turn her old Southern habits of hospitality to remunerative account. But as poor Fauquier could never be prevailed upon to present a bill to a gentleman, Sir, and as some of the scions of the best Southern families were still waiting for, or had been recently dismissed from, a position, the experiment was a pecuniary failure. Yet the house was of excellent repute and well patronized; indeed, it was worth something to see old Fauquier sitting at the head in his ancestral style, relating anecdotes of great men now dead and gone, interrupted only by occasional visits from importunate tradesmen.

Prominent among what Mr. Fauquier called his "little family," was a black-eyed lady of great powers of fascination, and considerable local reputation as a flirt. Never-

theless, these social aberrations were amply condoned by a facile and complacent husband, who looked with a lenient and even admiring eye upon the little lady's amusement, and to a certain extent lent a tacit indorsement to her conduct. Nobody minded Hopkinson; in the blaze of Mrs. Hopkinson's fascinations he was completely lost sight of. A few married women with unduly sensitive husbands, and several single ladies of the best and longest standing, reflected severely on her conduct. The younger men of course admired her, but I think she got her chief support from old fogies like ourselves. For it is your quiet, self-conceited, complacent, philosophic, broad-waisted *pater-familias* who, after all, is the one to whom the gay and giddy of the proverbially impulsive, unselfish sex owe their place in the social firmament. We are not inclined to be captious; we laugh at, as a folly, what our wives and daughters condemn as a fault; our "withers are unwrung," yet we still confess to the fascinations of a pretty face. We know, bless us, from dear experience, the exact value of one woman's opinion of another; we want our brilliant little friend to shine; it is only the moths who will burn their twopenny immature wings in the flame! And why should they not? Nature has been pleased to supply more moths than candles! Go to! — give the pretty creature — be she maid, wife, or widow — a show! And so, my dear sir, while *mater-familias* bends her black brows in disgust, we smile our superior little smile, and extend to Mistress Anonyma our gracious indorsement. And if Giddiness is grateful, or if Folly is friendly — well, of course, *we* can't help that. Indeed, it rather proves our theory.

I had intended to say something about Hopkinson, but really there is very little to say. He was invariably good-humored. A few ladies once tried to show him that he really ought to feel worse than he did about the conduct of his wife, and it is recorded that Hopkinson, in an excess of

good-humor and kindliness, promised to do so. Indeed the good fellow was so accessible that it is said that young De Lancy of the Tape Department confided to Hopkinson his jealousy of a rival, and revealed the awful secret that he (De Lancy) had reason to expect more loyalty from his (Hopkinson's) wife. The good fellow is reported to have been very sympathetic, and to have promised De Lancy to lend whatever influence he had with Mrs. Hopkinson in his favor. "You see," he said explanatorily to De Lancy, "she has a good deal to attend to lately, and I suppose has got rather careless — that 's women's ways. But if *I* can't bring her round I 'll speak to Gashwiler — I 'll get him to use his influence with Mrs. Hop. So cheer up, my boy, *he 'll* make it all right."

The appearance of a bouquet on the table of Mrs. Hopkinson was no rare event; nevertheless, Mr. Gashwiler's was not there. Its hideous contrasts had offended her woman's eye, — it is observable that good taste survives the wreck of all the other feminine virtues, — and she had distributed it to make boutonnières for other gentlemen. Yet when he appeared she said to him hastily, putting her little hand over the cardiac region: —

"I 'm so glad you came. But you gave me *such* a fright an hour ago."

Mr. Gashwiler was both pleased and astounded. "What have I done, my dear Mrs. Hopkinson?" he began.

"Oh, don't talk," she said sadly. "What have you done? indeed! Why, you sent me that beautiful bouquet. I could not mistake your taste in the arrangement of the flowers — but my husband was here. You know his jealousy. I was obliged to conceal it from him. *Never* — promise me now — *never* do it again."

Mr. Gashwiler gallantly protested.

"No! I am serious! I was so agitated; he must have seen me blush."

Nothing but the gross flattery of this speech could have clouded its manifest absurdity to the Gashwiler consciousness. But Mr. Gashwiler had already succumbed to the girlish half-timidity with which it was uttered. Nevertheless, he could not help saying, —

"But why should he be so jealous now? Only day before yesterday I saw Simpson of Duluth hand you a nosegay right before him!"

"Ah," returned the lady, "he was outwardly calm *then*, but you know nothing of the scene that occurred between us after you left."

"But," gasped the practical Gashwiler, "Simpson had given your husband that contract — a cool fifty thousand in his pocket!"

Mrs. Hopkinson looked as dignifiedly at Gashwiler as was consistent with five feet three (the extra three inches being a pyramidal structure of straw-colored hair), a frond of faint curls, a pair of laughing blue eyes, and a small belted waist. Then she said, with a casting down of her lids: —

"You forget that my husband loves me." And for once the minx appeared to look penitent. It was becoming, but as it had been originally practiced in a simple white dress, relieved only with pale blue ribbons, it was not entirely in keeping with beflounced lavender and rose-colored trimmings. Yet the woman who hesitates between her moral expression and the harmony of her dress is lost. And Mrs. Hopkinson was *victrix* by her very audacity.

Mr. Gashwiler was flattered. The most dissolute man likes the appearance of virtue. "But graces and accomplishments like yours, dear Mrs. Hopkinson," he said oleaginously, "belong to the whole country." Which, with something between a courtesy and a strut, he endeavored to represent. "And I shall want to avail myself of all," he added, "in the matter of the Castro claim. A little supper at Welcker's, a glass or two of champagne,

and a single flash of those bright eyes, and the thing is done."

"But," said Mrs. Hopkinson, "I've promised Josiah that I would give up all those frivolities, and although my conscience is clear, you know how people talk! Josiah hears it. Why, only last night, at a reception at the Patagonian Minister's, every woman in the room gossiped about me because I led the German with him. As if a married woman, whose husband was interested in the Government, could not be civil to the representative of a friendly power!"

Mr. Gashwiler did not see how Mr. Hopkinson's late contract for supplying salt pork and canned provisions to the army of the United States should make his wife susceptible to the advances of foreign princes, but he prudently kept that to himself. Still, not being himself a diplomat, he could not help saying —

"But I understood that Mr. Hopkinson did not object to your interesting yourself in this claim, and you know some of the stock" —

The lady started, and said —

"Stock! Dear Mr. Gashwiler, for heaven's sake don't mention that hideous name to me. Stock! I am sick of it! Have you gentlemen no other topic for a lady?"

She punctuated her sentence with a mischievous look at her interlocutor. For a second time, I regret to say that Mr. Gashwiler succumbed. The Roman constituency at Remus, it is to be hoped, were happily ignorant of this last defection of their great legislator. Mr. Gashwiler instantly forgot his theme — began to ply the lady with a certain bovine-like gallantry, which, it is to be said to her credit, she parried with a playful, terrier-like dexterity, when the servant suddenly announced, "Mr. Wiles."

Gashwiler started. Not so Mrs. Hopkinson, who however, prudently and quietly removed her own chair several inches from Gashwiler's.

"Do you know Mr. Wiles?" she asked pleasantly.

"No! That is, I — ah — yes, I may say I have had some business relations with him," responded Gashwiler, rising.

"Won't you stay?" she added pleadingly. "Do!"

Mr. Gashwiler's prudence always got the better of his gallantry. "Not now," he responded, in some nervousness. "Perhaps I had better go now, in view of what you have just said about gossip. You need not mention my name to this-er — this — Mr. Wiles." And with one eye on the door and an awkward dash at his lady's fingers, he withdrew.

There was no introductory formula to Mr. Wiles' interview. He dashed at once *in medias res.* "Gashwiler knows a woman that, he says, can help us against that Spanish girl who is coming here with proofs, prettiness, fascinations, and what not? You must find her out."

"Why?" asked the lady laughingly.

"Because I don't trust that Gashwiler. A woman with a pretty face and an ounce of brains could sell him out; ay, and *us* with him."

"Oh, say *two* ounces of brains. Mr. Wiles, Mr. Gashwiler is no fool."

"Possibly, except when your sex is concerned, and it is very likely that this woman is his superior."

"I should think so," said Mrs. Hopkinson with a mischievous look.

"Ah, you know her, then?"

"Not so well as I know him," said Mrs. H., quite seriously. "I wish I did."

"Well, you 'll find out if she 's to be trusted! You are laughing — it is a serious matter! This woman" —

Mrs. Hopkinson dropped him a charming curtsey and said —

"*C'est moi!*"

XII

A RACE FOR IT

Royal Thatcher worked hard. That the boyish little painter who shared his hospitality at the "Blue Mass" mine should afterward have little part in his active life seemed not inconsistent with his habits. At present the mine was his only mistress, claiming his entire time, exasperating him with fickleness, but still requiring that supreme devotion of which his nature was capable. It is possible that Miss Carmen saw this too, and so set about with feminine tact, if not to supplement, at least to make her rival less pertinacious and absorbing. Apart from this object she zealously labored in her profession, yet with small pecuniary result, I fear. Local art was at a discount in California. The scenery of the country had not yet become famous; rather, it was reserved for a certain Eastern artist, already famous, to make it so, and people cared little for the reproduction, under their very noses, of that which they saw continually with their own eyes and valued not. So that little Mistress Carmen was fain to divert her artist soul to support her plump little material body, and made divers excursions into the region of ceramic art, painting on velvet, illuminating missals, decorating china, and the like. I have in my possession some wax-flowers — a startling fuchsia, and a bewildering dahlia — sold for a mere pittance by this little lady, whose pictures lately took the prize at a foreign exhibition, shortly after she had been half-starved by a California public, and claimed by a California press as its fostered child of genius.

Of these struggles and triumphs Thatcher had no knowledge, yet he was perhaps more startled than he would

own to himself, when one December day, he received this despatch:

"Come to Washington at once. Carmen de Haro."

"Carmen de Haro!" I grieve to state that such was the preoccupation of this man, elected by fate to be the hero of the solitary amatory episode of this story, that for a moment he could not recall her. When the honest little figure that had so manfully stood up against him, and had proved her sex by afterwards running away from him, came back at last to his memory, he was at first mystified and then self-reproachful. He had been, he felt vaguely, untrue to himself. He had been remiss to the self-confessed daughter of his enemy. Yet why should she telegraph to him, and what was she doing in Washington? To all these speculations, it is to be said to his credit, that he looked for no sentimental or romantic answer. Royal Thatcher was naturally modest and self-depreciating in his relations to the other sex, as indeed most men, who are apt to be successful with women, generally are — despite a vast degree of superannuated bosh to the contrary. For the half-dozen women who are startled by sheer audacity into submission, there are scores who are piqued by a self-respectful patience. And where a woman has to do half the wooing, she generally makes a pretty sure thing of it.

In his bewilderment Thatcher had overlooked a letter lying on his table. It was from his Washington lawyer. The concluding paragraph caught his eye: "Perhaps it would be well if you came here yourself; Roscommon is here, and they say there is a niece of Garcia's, lately appeared, who is likely to get up a strong social sympathy for the old Mexican. I don't know that they expect to prove anything by her, but I 'm told she is attractive and clever, and has enlisted the sympathies of the delegation." Thatcher laid the letter down a little indignantly. Strong men are quite as liable as weak women are to sudden

inconsistencies on any question they may have in common. What right had this poor little bud he had cherished — he was quite satisfied now that he had cherished her, and really had suffered from her absence — what right had she to suddenly blossom in the sunshine of power, to be, perhaps, plucked and worn by one of his enemies? He did not agree with his lawyer that she was in any way connected with his enemies; he trusted to her masculine loyalty that far. But here was something vaguely dangerous to the feminine mind — position, flattery, power. He was almost as firmly satisfied now that he had been wronged and neglected as he had been positive a few moments before that he had been remiss in his attention. The irritation, although momentary, was enough to decide this strong man; he telegraphed to San Francisco, and having missed the steamer, secured an overland passage to Washington; thought better of it, and partly changed his mind an hour after the ticket was purchased — but, manlike, having once made a practical step in a wrong direction, he kept on rather than admit an inconsistency to himself. Yet he was not entirely satisfied that his journey was a business one. The impulsive, weak little Mistress Carmen had evidently scored one against the strong man.

Only a small part of the present great transcontinental railway at this time had been built, and was but piers at either end of a desolate and wild expanse as yet unbridged. When the overland traveler left the rail at Reno, he left, as it were, civilization with it, and until he reached the Nebraska frontier, the rest of his road was only the old emigrant trail traversed by the coaches of the Overland Company. Excepting a part of "Devil's Cañon," the way was unpicturesque and flat, and the passage of the Rocky Mountains, far from suggesting the alleged poetry of that region, was only a reminder of those sterile distances of a level New England landscape. The journey was a dreary

monotony, that was scarcely enlivened by its discomforts, never amounting to actual accident or incident, but utterly destructive to all nervous tissue. Insanity often supervened. "On the third day out," said Hank Monk, driver, speaking casually but charitably of a "fare" — "on the third day out, after axing no end of questions and getting no answers, he took to chewing straws that he picked outer the cushion, and kinder cussin' to himself. From that very day I knew it was all over with him, and I handed him over to his friends at 'Shy Ann,' strapped to the back seat, and ravin' and cussin' at Ben Holliday, the gent'manly proprietor." It is presumed that the unfortunate tourist's indignation was excited at the late Mr. Benjamin Holliday, then the proprietor of the line — an evidence of his insanity that no one who knew that large-hearted, fastidious, and elegantly cultured Californian, since allied to foreign nobility, will for a moment doubt.

Mr. Royal Thatcher was too old and experienced a mountaineer to do aught but accept patiently and cynically his brother Californian's method of increasing his profits. As it was generally understood that any one who came from California by that route had some dark design, the victim received little sympathy. Thatcher's equable temperament and indomitable will stood him in good stead, and helped him cheerfully in this emergency. He ate his scant meals, and otherwise took care of the functions of his weak human nature, when and where he could, without grumbling, and at times earned even the praise of his driver by his ability to "rough it." Which "roughing it," by the way, meant the ability of the passenger to accept the incompetency of the company. It is true there were times when he regretted that he had not taken the steamer, but then he reflected that he was one of a Vigilance Committee, sworn to hang that admirable man, the late Commodore William H. Vanderbilt, for certain practices and

cruelties done upon the bodies of certain steerage passengers by his line, and for divers irregularities in their transportation. I mention this fact merely to show how so practical and stout a voyager as Thatcher might have confounded the perplexities attending the administration of a great steamship company with selfish greed and brutality, and that he, with other Californians, may not have known the fact, since recorded by the Commodore's family clergyman, that the great millionaire was always true to the hymns of his childhood.

Nevertheless Thatcher found time to be cheerful and helpful to his fellow passengers, and even to be so far interesting to "Yuba Bill," driver, as to have the box seat placed at his disposal. "But," said Thatcher, in some concern, "the box seat was purchased by that other gentleman in Sacramento. He paid extra for it, and his name 's on your way-bill!" "That," said Yuba Bill, scornfully, "don't fetch me even ef he 'd chartered the whole shebang. Look yar, do you reckon I 'm goin' to sp'ile my temper by setting next to a man with a game eye. And such an eye! Gewhillikins! Why, darn my skin, the other day when we war watering at Webster's, he got down and passed in front of the off-leader — that yer pinto colt that 's bin accustomed to injins, grizzlies, and buffalo, and I 'm blest ef, when her eye tackled his, ef she did n't jist git up and rar 'round, that I reckoned I 'd hev to go down and take them blinders off from *her* eyes and clap 'em on his." "But he paid his money and is entitled to his seat," persisted Thatcher. "Mebbe he is — in the office of the kempeny," growled Yuba Bill, "but it 's time some folks knowed that out in the plains I run this yer team myself." A fact which was self-evident to most of the passengers. "I suppose his authority is as absolute on this dreary waste as the captain of a ship's in mid-ocean," explained Thatcher to the baleful-eyed stranger. Mr. Wiles — whom the reader has recognized

— assented with the public side of his face, but looked vengeance at Yuba Bill with the other, while Thatcher, innocent of the presence of one of his worst enemies, placated Bill so far as to restore Wiles to his rights. Wiles thanked him. "Shall I have the pleasure of your company far?" Wiles asked insinuatingly. "To Washington," replied Thatcher frankly. "Washington is a gay city during the session," again suggested the stranger. "I 'm going on business," said Thatcher bluntly.

A trifling incident occurred at Pine Tree Crossing which did not heighten Yuba Bill's admiration of the stranger. As Bill opened the double-locked box in the "boot" of the coach — sacred to Wells, Fargo & Co.'s Express and the Overland Company's treasures — Mr. Wiles perceived a small, black, morocco portmanteau among the parcels. "Ah, you carry baggage there too?" he said sweetly. "Not often," responded Yuba Bill shortly. "Ah, this then contains valuables?" "It belongs to that man whose seat you've got," said Yuba Bill, who, for insulting purposes of his own, preferred to establish the fiction that Wiles was an interloper, "and ef he reckons, in a sorter mixed kempeny like this, to lock up his portmantle, I don't know who's business it is. Who," continued Bill, lashing himself into a simulated rage, "who, in blank, is running this yer team? Hey? Mebbe you think, sittin' up thar on the box-seat, you are. Mebbe you think you kin see 'round corners with that thar eye, and kin pull up for teams 'round corners, on down grades, a mile ahead?" But here Thatcher, who with something of Launcelot's concern for Modred, had a noble pity for all infirmities, interfered so sternly that Yuba Bill stopped.

On the fourth day they struck a blinding snow-storm while ascending the dreary plateau that henceforward for six hundred miles was to be their road-bed. The horses, after floundering through the drift, gave out completely on reaching the next station, and the prospects ahead, to

all but the experienced eye, looked doubtful. A few passengers advised taking to sledges, others a postponement of the journey until the weather changed. Yuba Bill alone was for pressing forward as they were. "Two miles more and we 're on the high grade, whar the wind is strong enough to blow you through the windy and jist peart enough to pack away over them cliffs every inch of snow that falls. I 'll jist skirmish round in and out o' them drifts on these four wheels, whar ye can't drag one o' them flat-bottomed dry goods boxes through a drift." Bill had a California whip's contempt for a sledge. But he was warmly seconded by Thatcher, who had the next best thing to experience, the instinct that taught him to read character, and take advantage of another man's experience. "Them that wants to stop kin do so," said Bill, authoritatively, cutting the Gordian knot, "them as wants to take a sledge can do so — thar 's one in the barn. Them as wants to go on with me and the relay will come on." Mr. Wiles selected the sledge and a driver, a few remained for the next stage, and Thatcher, with two others, decided to accompany Yuba Bill. These changes took up some valuable time, and the storm continuing, the stage was run under the shed, the passengers gathering around the station fire, and not until after midnight did Yuba Bill put in the relays. "I wish you a good journey," said Wiles, as he drove from the shed as Bill entered. Bill vouchsafed no reply, but addressing himself to the driver, said curtly, as if giving an order for the delivery of goods, "Shove him out at Rawlings," passed contemptuously around to the tail-board of the sled and returned to the harnessing of his relay.

The moon came out and shone high as Yuba Bill once more took the reins in his hands. The wind, which instantly attacked them as they reached the level, seemed to make the driver's theory plausible, and for half a mile the

road-bed was swept clean and frozen hard. Farther on, a tongue of snow, extending from a boulder to the right, reached across their path to the height of two or three feet. But Yuba Bill dashed through a part of it, and by skillful manœuvring circumvented the rest. But even as the obstacle was passed the coach dropped with an ominous lurch on one side, and the off fore wheel flew off in the darkness. Bill threw the horses back on their haunches, but before their momentum could be checked the rear hind wheel slipped away, the vehicle rocked violently, plunged backwards and forwards, and stopped.

Yuba Bill was on the road in an instant with his lantern. Then followed an outbreak of profanity which I regret, for artistic purposes, exceeds that generous limit which a sympathizing public has already extended to me in the explication. Let me state, therefore, that in a very few moments he succeeded in disparaging the characters of his employers, their male and female relatives, the coach builder, the station keeper, the road on which he traveled and the travelers themselves, with occasional broad expletives addressed to himself and his own relatives. For the spirit of this and a more cultivated poetry of expression, I beg to refer the temperate reader to the 3d chapter of Job.

The passengers knew Bill, and sat, conservative, patient and expectant. As yet the cause of the catastrophe was not known. At last Thatcher's voice came from the box-seat —

"What 's up, Bill ? "

"Not a blank linch-pin in the whole blank coach," was the answer.

There was a dead silence. Yuba Bill executed a wild war dance of helpless rage.

"Blank the blank *enchanted* thing to blank ! "

(I beg here to refer the fastidious and cultivated reader to the only adjective I have dared transcribe of this actual

oath which I once had the honor of hearing. He will, I trust, not fail to recognize the old classic *dæmon* in this wild Western objurgation.)

"Who did it?" asked Thatcher.

Yuba Bill did not reply, but dashed up again to the box, unlocked the "boot," and screamed out —

"The man that stole your portmantle — Wiles!"

Thatcher laughed.

"Don't worry about that, Bill. A 'biled' shirt, an extra collar and a few papers. Nothing more."

Yuba Bill slowly descended. When he reached the ground he plucked Thatcher aside by his coat sleeve.

"Ye don't mean to say ye had nothing in that bag ye waz trying to get away with?"

"No," said the laughing Thatcher frankly.

"And that Wiles warn't one 'o them detectives?"

"Not to my knowledge, certainly."

Yuba Bill sighed sadly and returned to assist in the replacing of the coach on its wheels again.

"Never mind, Bill," said one of the passengers sympathizingly, "we 'll catch that man Wiles at 'Rawlings' sure," and he looked around at the inchoate vigilance committee already "rounding into form" about him.

"Ketch him!" returned Yuba Bill derisively, "why we 've got to go back to the station, and afore we 're off agin he 's pinted fur Clarmont on the relay we lose. Ketch him! H—ll 's full of such ketches!"

There was clearly nothing to do but to go back to the station to await the repairing of the coach. While this was being done Yuba Bill again drew Thatcher aside.

"I allers suspected that chap's game eye, but I did n't somehow allow for anything like this. I reckoned it was only the square thing to look arter things gen'rally, and 'specially your traps. So, to purvent trouble and keep things about 'ekal, ez he was goin' away, I sorter lifted this

yer bag of hiz outer the tail-board of his sleigh. I don't know as its any ex-change or compensation, but it may give ye a chance to spot him agin, or him you. It strikes me as bein' far-minded and squar," and with these words he deposited at the feet of the astounded Thatcher the black traveling bag of Mr. Wiles.

"But Bill — see here! I can't take this!" interrupted Thatcher hastily. "You can't swear that he's taken my bag — and— and — blank it all — this won't do, you know. I've no right to this man's things, even if" —

"Hold your hosses," said Bill gravely, "I ondertook to take charge o' your traps. I did n't — at least that d—d wall eyed — Thar's a portmantle. I don't know whose it is. Take it."

Half amused, half embarrassed, yet still protesting, Thatcher took the bag in his hands.

"Ye might open it in my presence," suggested Yuba Bill gravely.

Thatcher, half-laughingly, did so. It was full of papers and semi-legal looking documents. Thatcher's own name on one of them caught his eye; he opened the paper hastily and perused it. The smile faded from his lips.

"Well," said Yuba Bill, "suppose we call it a fair exchange at present."

Thatcher was still examining the papers. Suddenly this cautious, strong-minded man looked up into Yuba Bill's waiting face, and said quietly, in the despicable slang of the epoch and region —

"It's a go! Suppose we do."

XIII

HOW IT BECAME FAMOUS

Yuba Bill was right in believing that Wiles would lose no time at Rawlings. He left there on a fleet horse before Bill had returned with the broken-down coach to the last station, and distanced the telegram sent to detain him two hours. Leaving the stage road and its dangerous telegraphic stations, he pushed southward to Denver over the army trail, in company with a half-breed packer, crossing the Missouri before Thatcher had reached Julesburg. When Thatcher was at Omaha, Wiles was already in St. Louis, and as the Pullman car containing the hero of the "Blue Mass Mine" rolled into Chicago, Wiles was already walking the streets of the National Capital. Nevertheless he had time en route to sink in the waters of the North Platte, with many expressions of disgust, the little black portmanteau belonging to Thatcher, containing his dressing case, a few unimportant letters, and an extra shirt, to wonder why simple men did not travel with their important documents and valuables, and to set on foot some prudent and cautious inquiries regarding his own lost carpet-bag and its important contents.

But for these trifles he had every reason to be satisfied with the progress of his plans. "It 's all right," said Mrs. Hopkinson merrily, "while you and Gashwiler have been working with your 'stock' and treating the whole world as if it could be bribed, I've done more with that earnest, self-believing, self-deceiving and perfectly pathetic Roscommon than all you fellows put together. Why I've told his pitiful story and drawn tears from the eyes of senators and cabinet ministers. More than that, I've introduced him into society, put him in a dress coat — such a figure —

and you know how the best folk worship everything that is outré as the sincere thing; I 've made him a complete success. Why, only the other night, when Senator Misnancy and Judge Fitzdawdle were here, after making him tell his story — which you know I think he really believes — I sang, 'There came to the beach a poor exile of Erin,' and my husband told me afterwards it was worth at least a dozen votes."

"But about this rival of yours — this niece of Garcia's?"

"Another of your blunders — you men know nothing of women. Firstly, she 's a swarthy little brunette, with dots for eyes, and strides like a man, dresses like a dowdy, don't wear stays and has no style. Then she 's a single woman and alone, and although she affects to be an artist and has Bohemian ways, don't you see she can't go into society without a chaperon or somebody to go with her? Nonsense!"

"But," persisted Wiles, "she must have some power; there 's Judge Mason and Senator Peabody, who are constantly talking about her, and Dinwiddie of Virginia escorted her through the Capitol the other day."

Mistress Hopkinson laughed. "Mason and Peabody aspire to be thought literary and artistic, and Dinwiddie wanted to pique *me!*"

"But Thatcher is no fool" —

"Is Thatcher a lady's man?" queried the lady suddenly.

"Hardly, I should say," responded Wiles. "He pretends to be absorbed in his swindle and devoted to his mine, and I don't think that even you" — he stopped with a slight sneer.

"There, you are misunderstanding me again, and what is worse, you are misunderstanding your case. Thatcher is pleased with her because he has probably seen no one else. Wait till he comes to Washington and has an opportunity

for comparison," and she cast a frank glance at her mirror, where Wiles, with a sardonic bow, left her standing.

Mr. Gashwiler was quite as confident of his own success with Congress. "We are within a few days of the end of the session. We will manage to have it taken up and rushed through before that fellow Thatcher knows what he is about."

"If it could be done before he gets here," said Wiles, "it 's a reasonably sure thing. He is delayed two days — he might have been delayed longer." Here Mr. Wiles sighed; if the accident had happened on a mountain road, and the stage had been precipitated over the abyss? What valuable time would have been saved and success become a surety! But Mr. Wiles' functions as an advocate did not include murder; at least he was doubtful if it could be taxed as costs.

"We need have no fears, sir," resumed Mr. Gashwiler, "the matter is now in the hands of the highest tribunal of appeal in the country. It will meet, sir, with inflexible justice. I have already prepared some remarks" —

"By the way," interrupted Wiles infelicitously, "where 's your young man — your private secretary — Dobbs?"

The Congressman for a moment looked confused. "He is not here. And I must correct your error in applying that term to him. I have never put my confidence in the hands of any one."

"But you introduced him to me as your secretary?"

"A mere honorary title, sir. A brevet rank. I might, it is true, have thought to repose such a trust in him. But I was deceived, sir, as I fear I am too apt to be when I permit my feelings as a man to overcome my duty as an American legislator. Mr. Dobbs enjoyed my patronage and the opportunity it gave me to introduce him into public life only to abuse it. He became, I fear, deeply indebted. His extravagance was unlimited, his ambition

unbounded, but without, sir, a cash basis. I advanced money to him from time to time upon the little property you so generously extended to him for his services. But it was quietly dissipated. Yet, sir, such is the ingratitude of man that his family lately appealed to me for assistance. I felt it was necessary to be stern, and I refused. I would not for the sake of his family say anything, but I have missed, sir, books from my library. On the day after he left, two volumes of Patent Office reports and a Blue Book of Congress, purchased that day by me at a store on Pennsylvania avenue, were *missing* — missing! I had difficulty, sir, great difficulty in keeping it from the papers!"

As Mr. Wiles had heard the story already from Gashwiler's acquaintance, with more or less free comment on the gifted legislator's economy, he could not help thinking that the difficulty had been great indeed. But he only fixed his malevolent eye on Gashwiler and said —

"So he is gone, eh?"

"Yes."

"And you've made an enemy of him? That's bad."

Mr. Gashwiler tried to look dignifiedly unconcerned, but something in his visitor's manner made him uneasy.

"I say it's bad, if you have. Listen. Before I left here I found at a boarding-house where he had boarded, and still owed a bill, a trunk which the landlord retained. Opening it I found some letters and papers of yours, with certain memoranda of his, which I thought ought to be in *your* possession. As an alleged friend of his I redeemed the trunk by paying the amount of his bill, and secured the more valuable papers."

Gashwiler's face, which had grown apoplectically suffused as Wiles went on, at last gasped, "But you got the trunk and have the papers?"

"Unfortunately, no; and that's why it's bad."

"But good God! what have you done with them?"

"I 've lost them somewhere on the Overland Road."

Mr. Gashwiler sat for a few moments speechless, vacillating between a purple rage and a pallid fear. Then he said hoarsely —

"They are all blank forgeries — every one of them."

"Oh no!" said Wiles, smiling blankly on his dexter side, and enjoying the whole scene malevolently with his sinister eye. "Your papers are all genuine, and I won't say are not all right, but unfortunately I had in the same bag some memoranda of my own for the use of my client, that, you understand, might be put to some bad use if found by a clever man."

The two rascals looked at each other. There is, on the whole, really very little "honor among thieves" — at least great ones; and the inferior rascal succumbed at the reflection of what he might do if he were in the other rascal's place. "See here, Wiles," he said, relaxing his dignity with the perspiration that oozed from every pore, and made the collar of his shirt a mere limp rag. "See here, *We*" — this first use of the plural was equivalent to a confession — "*we* must get them papers."

"Of course," said Wiles coolly, "if we *can*, and if Thatcher don't get wind of them."

"He cannot."

"He was on the coach when I lost them, coming East."

Mr. Gashwiler paled again. In the emergency he had recourse to the sideboard and a bottle, forgetting Wiles. Ten minutes before, Wiles would have remained seated; but it is recorded that he rose, took the bottle from the gifted Gashwiler's fingers, helped himself *first* and then sat down.

"Yes, but, my boy," said Gashwiler, now rapidly changing situations with the cooler Wiles, "yes, but, old fellow," he added, poking Wiles with a fat forefinger, "don't you see the whole thing will be up before he gets here?"

"Yes," said Wiles gloomily, "but those lazy, easy, honest men have a way of popping up just at the nick of time. They never need hurry; all things wait for them. Why, don't you remember that on the very day Mrs. Hopkinson and me and you got the President to sign that patent, that very day one of them d—n fellows turns up from San Francisco or Australia, having taken his own time to get here; gets here about half an hour after the President had signed the patent and sent it over to the office, finds the right man to introduce him to the President, has a talk with him, makes him sign an order countermanding its issuance, and undoes all that has been done in six years in one hour."

"Yes, but Congress is a tribunal that does not revoke its decrees," said Gashwiler with a return of his old manner; "at least," he added, observing an incredulous shrug in the shoulders of his companion, "at least *during the session.*"

"We shall see," said Wiles, quietly taking his hat.

"We shall see, sir," said the member from Remus with dignity.

XIV

WHO INTRIGUED FOR IT

There was at this time in the Senate of the United States an eminent and respected gentleman, scholarly, orderly, honorable and radical — the fit representative of a scholarly, orderly, honorable and radical commonwealth. For many years he had held his trust with conscious rectitude, and a slight depreciation of other forms of merit, and for as many years had been as regularly returned to his seat by his constituency with equally conscious rectitude in themselves, and an equal scepticism regarding others. Removed by his nature beyond the reach of certain temptations, and by

circumstances beyond even the knowledge of others, his social and political integrity was spotless. An orator and practical debater, his refined tastes kept him from personality, and the public recognition of the complete unselfishness of his motives and the magnitude of his dogmas, protected him from scurrility. His principles had never been appealed to by a bribe; he had rarely been approached by an emotion.

A man of polished taste in art and literature, and possessing the means to gratify it, his luxurious home was filled with treasures he had himself collected, and further enhanced by the stamp of his own appreciation. His library had not only the elegance of adornment that his wealth could bring and his taste approve, but a certain refined negligence of habitual use and the easy disorder of the artist's workshop. All this was quickly noted by a young girl who stood on its threshold at the close of a dull January day.

The card that had been brought to the Senator bore the name of "Carmen de Haro," and modestly, in the right-hand corner, in almost microscopic script, the further description of herself as "Artist." Perhaps the picturesqueness of the name and its historic suggestion caught the scholar's taste, for, when to his request, through his servant, that she would be kind enough to state her business, she replied as frankly that her business was personal to himself, he directed that she should be admitted. Then, entrenching himself behind his library table, overlooking a bastion of books, and a glacis of pamphlets and papers, and throwing into his forehead and eyes an expression of utter disqualification for anything but the business before him, he calmly awaited the intruder.

She came, and for an instant stood, hesitatingly, framing herself as a picture in the door. Mrs. Hopkinson was right — she had "no style," unless an original and half

foreign quaintness could be called so. There was a desperate attempt visible to combine an American shawl with the habits of a mantilla, and it was always slipping from one shoulder, that was so supple and vivacious as to betray the deficiencies of an education in stays. There was a cluster of black curls around her low forehead, fitting her so closely as to seem to be a part of the seal-skin cap she wore. Once, from the force of habit, she attempted to put her shawl over her head and talk through the folds gathered under her chin, but an astonished look from the Senator checked her. Nevertheless, he felt relieved, and, rising, motioned her to a chair with a heartiness he would have scarcely shown to a Parisian toilleta. And when, with two or three quick, long steps, she reached his side, and showed a frank, innocent, but strong and determined little face, feminine only in its flash of eye and beauty of lip and chin curves, he put down the pamphlet he had taken up somewhat ostentatiously, and gently begged to know her business.

I think I have once before spoken of her voice — an organ more often cultivated by my fair countrywomen for singing than for speaking, which, considering that much of our practical relations with the sex are carried on without the aid of an opera score, seems a mistaken notion of theirs — and of its sweetness, gentle inflection and musical emphasis. She had the advantage of having been trained in a musical language, and came of a race with whom catarrhs and sore throats were rare. So that in a few brief phrases she sang the Senator into acquiescence as she imparted the plain libretto of her business — namely, a "desire to see some of his rare engravings."

Now the engravings in question were certain etchings of the early great apprentices of the art, and were, I am happy to believe, extremely rare. From my unprofessional view they were exceedingly bad — showing the mere genesis

of something since perfected, but dear, of course, to the true collector's soul. I don't believe that Carmen really admired them either. But the minx knew that the Senator prided himself on having the only "pot-hooks" of the great "A" or the first artistic efforts of "B" — I leave the real names to be filled in by the connoisseur — and the Senator became interested. For the last year, two or three of these abominations had been hanging in his study, utterly ignored by the casual visitor. But here was appreciation! "She was," she added, "only a poor young artist, unable to purchase such treasures, but equally unable to resist the opportunity afforded her, even at the risk of seeming bold, or of obtruding upon a great man's privacy," etc., etc.

This flattery, which, if offered in the usual legal tender of the country, would have been looked upon as counterfeit, delivered here in a foreign accent, with a slightly tropical warmth, was accepted by the Senator as genuine. These children of the Sun are so impulsive! We, of course, feel a little pity for the person who thus transcends our standard of good taste and violates our conventional canons — but they are always sincere. The cold New Englander saw nothing wrong in one or two direct and extravagant compliments, that would have insured his visitor's early dismissal if tendered in the clipped metallic phrases of the commonwealth he represented.

So that in a few moments the black, curly head of the little artist and the white, flowing locks of the Senator were close together bending over the rack that contained the engravings. It was then that Carmen, listening to a graphic description of the early rise of Art in the Netherlands, forgot herself and put her shawl around her head, holding its folds in her little brown hand. In this situation they were, at different times during the next two hours, interrupted by five Congressmen, three Senators, a Cabinet

officer, and a Judge of the Supreme Bench — each of whom was quickly but courteously dismissed. Popular sentiment, however, broke out in the hall.

"Well, I 'm blanked, but this gets me." (The speaker was a Territorial delegate.)

"At his time o' life, too, lookin' over pictures with a gal young enough to be his grandchild." (This from a venerable official, since suspected of various erotic irregularities.)

"She don't handsome any." (The honorable member from Dakotah.)

"This accounts for his protracted silence during the session." (A serious colleague from the Senator's own State.)

"Oh, blank it all!" (*Omnes.*)

Four went home to tell their wives. There are few things more touching in the matrimonial compact than the superb frankness with which each confide to each the various irregularities of their friends. It is upon these sacred confidences that the firm foundations of marriage rest unshaken.

Of course the objects of this comment, at least *one* of them, were quite oblivious. "I trust," said Carmen timidly, when they had for the fourth time regarded in rapt admiration an abominable something by some Dutch wood-chopper, "I trust I am not keeping you from your great friends," — her pretty eyelids were cast down in tremulous distress — "I should never forgive myself. Perhaps it is important business of the State?"

"Oh dear, no! *They* will come again — it 's *their* business."

The Senator meant it kindly. It was as near the perilous edge of a compliment as your average cultivated Boston man ever ventures, and Carmen picked it up, femininely, by its sentimental end. "And I suppose *I* shall not trouble you again?"

"I shall always be proud to place the portfolio at your disposal. Command me at any time," said the Senator, with dignity.

"You are kind. You are good," said Carmen, "and I — I am but — look you — only a poor girl from California, that you know not."

"Pardon me. I know your country well." And indeed he could have told her the exact number of bushels of wheat to the acre in her own county of Monterey, its voting population, its political bias. Yet of the more important product before him, after the manner of book-read men, he knew nothing.

Carmen was astonished, but respectful. It transpired presently that she was not aware of the rapid growth of the silk-worm in her own district, knew nothing of the Chinese question, and very little of the American mining laws. Upon these questions the Senator enlightened her fully. "Your name is historic, by the way," he said pleasantly; "there was a Knight of Alcantara, a 'de Haro,' one of the emigrants with Las Casas."

Carmen nodded her head quickly, "Yes; my great-great-great-g-r-e-a-t grandfather!"

The Senator stared.

"Oh yes. I am the niece of Victor Castro, who married my father's sister."

"The Victor Castro of the Blue Mass Mine?" asked the Senator abruptly.

"Yes," quietly.

Had the Senator been of the Gashwiler type, he would have expressed himself, after the average masculine fashion, by a long-drawn whistle. But his only perceptible appreciation of a sudden astonishment and suspicion in his mind was a lowering of the social thermometer of the room so decided that poor Carmen looked up innocently, chilled, and drawing her shawl closer round her shoulders.

"I have something more to ask," said Carmen, hanging her head — "it is a great, oh, a very great favor."

The Senator had retreated behind his bastion of books again, and was visibly preparing for an assault. He saw it all now. He had been, in some vague way, deluded. He had given confidential audience to the niece of one of the Great Claimants before Congress. The inevitable axe had come to the grindstone. What might not this woman dare ask of him? He was the more implacable that he felt he had already been prepossessed — and honestly prepossessed — in her favor. He was angry with her for having pleased him. Under the icy polish of his manner there were certain Puritan callosites caused by early strait-lacing. He was not yet quite free from his ancestor's cheerful ethics, that Nature, as represented by an Impulse, was as much to be restrained as Order represented by a Quaker.

Without apparently noticing his manner, Carmen went on, with a certain potential freedom of style, gesture, and manner scarcely to be indicated in her mere words. "You know, then, I am of Spanish blood, and that, in what was my adopted country, our motto was, 'God and Liberty.' It was of you, sir — the great Emancipator — the apostle of that Liberty — the friend of the down-trodden and oppressed — that I, as a child, first knew. In the histories of this great country I have read of you, I have learned your orations. I have longed to hear you in your own pulpit deliver the creed of my ancestors. To hear you, of yourself, speak, ah! Madre de Dios! what shall I say — speak the oration eloquent to make the — what you call — the debate, that is what I have for so long hoped. Eh! Pardon — you are thinking me foolish — wild, eh — a small child — eh?"

Becoming more and more dialectical as she went on, she said suddenly, "I have you of myself offended. You are mad of me as a bold, bad child? Is it so?"

The Senator, as visibly becoming limp and weak again behind his entrenchments, managed to say, "Oh, no!" then, "Really!" and finally, "Tha-a-nks!"

"I am here but for a day. I return to California in a day, as it were to-morrow. I shall never — never hear you speak in your place in the Capitol of this great country?"

The Senator said, hastily, that he feared, he in fact was convinced, that his duty during this session was required more at his desk, in the committee work, than in speaking, etc., etc.

"Ah," said Carmen, sadly, "it is true, then, all this that I have heard. It is true that what they have told me — that you have given up the great party — that your voice is not longer heard in the old — what you call this — eh — the old *issues?*"

"If any one has told you that, Miss De Haro," responded the Senator, sharply, "he has spoken foolishly. You have been misinformed. May I ask who" —

"Ah!" said Carmen, "I know not! It is in the air! I am a stranger. Perhaps I am de-ceived. But it is of all. I say to them, When shall I hear him speak? I go day after day to the Capitol, I watch him — the great Emancipator — but it is of business, eh? — it is the claim of that one, it is the Tax, eh? it is the Impost, it is the Post-office, but it is the great speech of Human Rights — *never*, NEVER. I say, 'How arrives all this?' And some say and shake their heads, 'Never again he speaks.' He is what you call 'played' — yes, it is so, eh? 'played out.' I know it not — it is a word from Bos-ton, perhaps? They say he has — eh, I speak not the English well — the party he has 'shaken,' 'shook' — yes — he has the Party 'shaken,' eh? It is right — it is the language of Boston, eh?"

"Permit me to say, Miss De Haro," returned the Sen-

ator, rising with some asperity, "that you seem to have been unfortunate in your selection of acquaintances, and still more so in your ideas of the derivations of the English tongue. The — er — the — er — expressions you have quoted are not common to Boston, but emanate, I believe, from the West."

Carmen De Haro contritely buried everything but her black eyes in her shawl.

"No one," he continued more gently, sitting down again, "has the right to forecast from my past what I intend to do in the future, or designate the means I may choose to serve the principles I hold or the Party I represent. Those are *my* functions. At the same time, should occasion — or opportunity — for we are within a day or two of the close of the Session" —

"Yes," interrupted Carmen, sadly, "I see — it will be some business, some claim, something for somebody — ah! Madre de Dios — you will not speak, and I" —

"When do you think of returning?" asked the Senator, with grave politeness, "when are we to lose you?"

"I shall stay to the last — to the end of the Session," said Carmen. "And now I shall go." She got up and pulled her shawl viciously over her shoulders with a pretty pettishness, perhaps the most feminine thing she had done that evening. Possibly, the most genuine.

The Senator smiled affably: "You do not deserve to be disappointed in either case; but it is later than you imagine; let me help you on the shorter distance with my carriage; it is at the door."

He accompanied her gravely to the carriage. As it rolled away she buried her little figure in its ample cushions and chuckled to herself, albeit a little hysterically. When she had reached her destination she found herself crying, and hastily, and somewhat angrily, dried her eyes as she drew up at the door of her lodgings.

"How have you prospered?" asked Mr. Harlowe, of counsel for Royal Thatcher, as he gallantly assisted her from the carriage. "I have been waiting here for two hours; your interview must have been prolonged — that was a good sign."

"Don't ask me now," said Carmen, a little savagely, "I'm worn out and tired."

Mr. Harlowe bowed. "I trust you will be better to-morrow, for we expect our friend, Mr. Thatcher."

Carmen's brown cheek flushed slightly. "He should have been here before. Where is he? What was he doing?"

"He was snowed up on the plains. He is coming as fast as steam can carry him, but he may be too late."

Carmen did not reply.

The lawyer lingered. "How did you find the great New England Senator?" he asked, with a slight professional levity.

Carmen was tired, Carmen was worried, Carmen was a little self-reproachful, and she kindled easily. Consequently she said icily —

"I found him *a gentleman!*"

XV

HOW IT BECAME UNFINISHED BUSINESS

The closing of the LXIX Congress was not unlike the closing of the several preceding Congresses. There was the same unbusiness-like, impractical haste; the same hurried, unjust, and utterly inadequate adjustment of unfinished, ill-digested business, that would not have been tolerated for a moment by the sovereign people in any private interest they controlled. There were frauds rushed through; there were long-suffering, righteous demands

shelved; there were honest, unpaid debts dishonored by scant appropriations; there were closing scenes which only the saving sense of American humor kept from being utterly vile. The actors, the legislators themselves, knew it and laughed at it; the commentators, the Press, knew it and laughed at it; the audience, the great American people knew it and laughed at it. And nobody for an instant conceived that it ever, under any circumstances, might be otherwise.

The claim of Roscommon was among the Unfinished Business. The claimant himself, haggard, pathetic, importunate and obstinate, was among the Unfinished Business. Various Congressmen, more or less interested in the success of the claim, were among the Unfinished Business. The member from Fresno, who had changed his derringer for a speech against the claimant, was among the Unfinished Business. The gifted Gashwiler, uneasy in his soul over certain other unfinished business in the shape of his missing letters, but dropping oil and honey as he mingled with his brothers, was King of Misrule and Lord of the Unfinished Business. Pretty Mrs. Hopkinson, prudently escorted by her husband, but imprudently ogled by admiring Congressmen, lent the charm of her presence to the finishing of Unfinished Business. One or two editors, who had dreams of a finished financial business, arising out of unfinished business, were there also, like ancient bards, to record with pæan or threnody the completion of Unfinished Business. Various unclean birds, scenting carrion in Unfinished Business, hovered in the halls or roosted in the Lobby.

The lower house, under the tutelage of their gifted Gashwiler, drank deeply of Roscommon and his intoxicating claim, and passed the half empty bottle to the Senate as Unfinished Business. But alas! in the very rush and storm and tempest of the finishing business, an unlooked-for interruption arose in the person of a great Senator whose power

none could oppose, whose right to free and extended utterance at all times none could gainsay. A claim for poultry, violently seized by the army of Sherman during his march through Georgia, from the hen-coop of an alleged loyal Irishman, opened a constitutional question, and with it the lips of the great Senator.

For seven hours he spoke eloquently, earnestly, convincingly. For seven hours the old issues of party and policy were severally taken up and dismissed in the old forcible rhetoric that had early made him famous. Interruption from other Senators, now forgetful of Unfinished Business and wild with reanimated party zeal; interruptions from certain Senators mindful of Unfinished Business, and unable to pass the Roscommon bottle, only spurred him to fresh exertion. The tocsin sounded in the Senate was heard in the lower house. Highly excited members congregated at the doors of the Senate, and left Unfinished Business to take care of itself.

Left to itself for seven hours, Unfinished Business gnashed its false teeth and tore its wig in impotent fury in corridor and hall. For seven hours the gifted Gashwiler had continued the manufacture of oil and honey, whose sweetness, however, was slowly palling upon the Congressional lip; for seven hours Roscommon and friends beat with impatient feet the lobby and shook fists, more or less discolored, at the distinguished Senator. For seven hours the one or two editors were obliged to sit and calmly compliment the great speech which that night flashed over the wires of a continent with the old electric thrill. And, worse than all, they were obliged to record with it the closing of the LXIX Congress, with more than the usual amount of Unfinished Business.

A little group of friends surrounded the great Senator with hymns of praise and congratulations. Old adversaries saluted him courteously as they passed by, with the respect

of strong men. A little woman with a shawl drawn over her shoulders, and held with one small brown hand, approached him timidly —

"I speak not the English well," she said gently, "but I have read much. I have read in the plays of your Shakespeare. I would like to say to you the words of Rosalind to Orlando, when he did fight: 'Sir, you have wrestled well, and have overthrown more than your enemies.'" And with these words she was gone.

Yet not so quickly but that pretty Mrs. Hopkinson, coming — as Victrix always comes to Victor — to thank the great Senator, albeit the faces of her escorts were shrouded in gloom, saw the shawled figure disappear.

"There," she said, pinching Wiles mischievously, "there! that's the woman you were afraid of. Look at her. Look at that dress. Ah, heavens! look at that shawl. Did n't I tell you she had no style?"

"Who is she?" said Wiles sullenly.

"Carmen de Haro, of course," said the lady vivaciously. "What are you hurrying away so for? You 're absolutely pulling me along."

Mr. Wiles had just caught sight of the travel-worn face of Royal Thatcher among the crowd that thronged the staircase. Thatcher appeared pale and distrait; Mr. Harlowe, his counsel, at his side, rallied him.

"No one would think you had just got a new lease of your property, and escaped a great swindle. What's the matter with you? Miss De Haro passed us just now. It was she who spoke to the Senator. Why did you not recognize her?"

"I was thinking," said Thatcher gloomily.

"Well, you take things coolly! And certainly you are not very demonstrative towards the woman who saved you to-day. For as sure as you live it was she who drew that speech out of the Senator."

Thatcher did not reply, but moved away. He *had* noticed Carmen de Haro, and was about to greet her with mingled pleasure and embarrassment. But he had heard her compliment to the Senator, and this strong, preoccupied, automatic man, who only ten days before had no thought beyond his property, was now thinking more of that compliment to another than of his success — and was beginning to hate the Senator who had saved him, the lawyer who stood beside him, and even the little figure that had tripped down the steps unconscious of him.

XVI

AND WHO FORGOT IT

It was somewhat inconsistent with Royal Thatcher's embarrassment and sensitiveness that he should, on leaving the Capitol, order a carriage and drive directly to the lodgings of Miss De Haro. That on finding she was not at home he should become again sulky and suspicious, and even be ashamed of the honest impulse that led him there, was, I suppose, man-like and natural. He felt that he had done all that courtesy required: he had promptly answered her despatch with his presence. If she chose to be absent at such a moment, *he* had at least done *his* duty. In short, there was scarcely any absurdity of the imagination which this once practical man did not permit himself to indulge in, yet always with a certain consciousness that he was allowing his feelings to run away with him — a fact that did not tend to make him better humored, and rather inclined him to place the responsibility of the elopement on somebody else. If Miss De Haro had been home, etc., etc., and not going into ecstacies over speeches, etc., etc., and had attended to her business — *i. e.*, being exactly what he had supposed her to be — all this would not have happened.

I am aware that this will not heighten the reader's respect for my hero. But I fancy that the imperceptible progress of a sincere passion in the matured strong man is apt to be marked with even more than the usual haste and absurdity of callous youth. The fever that runs riot in the veins of the robust is apt to pass your ailing weakling by. Possibly there may be some immunity in inoculation. It is Lothario who is always self-possessed and does and says the right thing, while poor honest Cælebs becomes ridiculous with genuine emotion.

He rejoined his lawyer in no very gracious mood. The chambers occupied by Mr. Harlowe were in the basement of a private dwelling once occupied and made historic by an Honorable Somebody, who, however, was remembered only by the landlord and the last tenant. There were various shelves in the walls divided into compartments, sarcastically known as "pigeon-holes," in which the dove of peace had never rested, but which still perpetuated, in their legends, the feuds and animosities of suitors now but common dust together. There was a portrait, apparently of a cherub, which on nearer inspection turned out to be a famous English Lord Chancellor in his flowing wig. There were books with dreary, unenlivening titles — egotistic always, as recording Smith's opinions on this, and Jones's commentaries on that. There was a handbill tacked on the wall, which at first offered hilarious suggestions of a circus or a steamboat excursion, but which turned out only to be a sheriff's sale. There were several oddly-shaped packages in newspaper wrappings, mysterious and awful in dark corners, that might have contained forgotten law papers or the previous week's washing of the eminent counsel. There were one or two newspapers, which at first offered entertaining prospects to the waiting client, but always proved to be a law record or a Supreme Court decision. There was the bust of a late distinguished jurist, which apparently had never been dusted

since he himself became dust, and had already grown a perceptibly dusty moustache on his severely-judicial upper lip. It was a cheerless place in the sunshine of day; at night, when it ought, by every suggestion of its dusty past, to have been left to the vengeful ghosts, the greater part of whose hopes and passions were recorded and gathered there — when in the dark the dead hands of forgotten men were stretched from their dusty graves to fumble once more for their old title deeds — at night, when it was lit up by flaring gaslight, the hollow mockery of this dissipation was so apparent that people in the streets, looking through the illuminated windows, felt as if the privacy of a family vault had been intruded upon by body-snatchers.

Royal Thatcher glanced around the room, took in all its dreary suggestions in a half-weary, half-indifferent sort of way, and dropped into the lawyer's own revolving chair as that gentleman entered from the adjacent room.

"Well, you got back soon, I see," said Harlowe briskly.

"Yes," said his client without looking up, and with this notable distinction between himself and all other previous clients, that he seemed absolutely less interested than the lawyer. "Yes, I 'm here, and upon my soul I don't exactly know why."

"You told me of certain papers you had discovered," said the lawyer suggestively.

"Oh yes," returned Thatcher with a slight yawn. "I've got here some papers somewhere" — he began to feel in his coat-pocket languidly — "but, by the way, this is a rather dreary and God-forsaken sort of place! Let 's go up to Welcker's, and you can look at them over a bottle of champagne."

"After I 've looked at them, I 've something to show you myself," said Harlowe, "and as for the champagne, we 'll have that in the other room, by and by. At present I want to have my head clear, and yours too — if you 'll oblige me

by becoming sufficiently interested in your own affairs to talk to me about them."

Thatcher was gazing abstractedly at the fire. He started. "I dare say," he began, "I 'm not very interesting; yet it 's possible that my affairs have taken up a little too much of my time. However" — he stopped, took from his pocket an envelope and threw it on the desk — "there are some papers. I don't know what value they may be; that is for you to determine. I don't know that I 've any legal right to their possession — that 's for you to say, too. They came to me in a queer way. On the overland journey here I lost my bag, containing my few traps and some letters and papers 'of no value,' as the advertisements always say, 'to any but the owner.' Well, the bag was lost, but the stage-driver declares that it was stolen by a fellow-passenger, a — man by the name of Giles, or Stiles, or Biles" —

"Wiles," said Harlowe earnestly.

"Yes," continued Thatcher, suppressing a yawn; "yes, I guess you 're right — Wiles. Well, the stage-driver, firmly believing this, goes to work and quietly and unostentatiously steals — I say, have you got a cigar?"

"I 'll get you one."

Harlowe disappeared in the adjoining room. Thatcher dragged Harlowe's heavy revolving desk chair, which never before had been removed from its sacred position, to the fire, and began to poke the coals abstractedly.

Harlowe reappeared with cigars and matches. Thatcher lit one mechanically, and said between the puffs —

"Do you — ever — talk — to yourself?"

"No! — why?"

"I thought I heard your voice just now in the other room. Anyhow, this is an awful spooky place. If I stayed here alone half an hour I 'd fancy that the Lord Chancellor up there would step down in his robes, out of his frame, to keep me company."

"Nonsense! When I'm busy I often sit here and write until after midnight. It's so quiet!"

"D—mnably so!"

"Well, to go back to the papers. Somebody stole your bag, or you lost it. *You* stole"—

"The driver stole," suggested Thatcher, so languidly that it could hardly be called an interruption.

"Well, we'll say the driver stole, and passed over to you as his accomplice, confederate, or receiver, certain papers belonging"—

"See here, Harlowe, I don't feel like joking in a ghostly law office after midnight. Here are your facts. Yuba Bill, the driver, stole a bag from this passenger, Wiles, or Smiles, and handed it to me to insure the return of my own. I found in it some papers concerning my case. There they are. Do with them what you like."

Thatcher turned his eyes again abstractedly to the fire.

Harlowe took out the first paper.

"A-w, this seems to be a telegram. Yes, eh? 'Come to Washington at once. Carmen de Haro.'"

Thatcher started, and blushed like a girl, and hurriedly reached for the paper. "Nonsense. That's a mistake. A despatch I mislaid in the envelope."

"I see," said the lawyer drily.

"I thought I had torn it up," continued Thatcher, after an awkward pause. I regret to say that here that usually truthful man elaborated a fiction. He had consulted it a dozen times a day on the journey, and it was quite worn in its enfoldings. Harlowe's quick eye had noticed this, but he speedily became interested and absorbed in the other papers. Thatcher lapsed into contemplation of the fire.

"Well," said Harlowe, finally turning to his client, "here's enough to unseat Gashwiler, or close his mouth. As to the rest, it's good reading — but I need n't tell you — no *legal* evidence. But it's proof enough to stop them

from ever trying it again — when the existence of this record is made known. Bribery is a hard thing to fix on a man; the only witness is naturally *particeps criminis* — but it would not be easy for them to explain away this rascal's record. One or two things I don't understood: What's this opposite the Hon. X.'s name, 'Took the medicine nicely, and feels better?' — and here, just in the margin, after Y.'s, 'Must be labored with?'"

"I suppose our California slang borrows largely from the medical and spiritual professions," returned Thatcher. "But is n't it odd that a man should keep a conscientious record of his own villainy?"

Harlowe, a little abashed at his want of knowledge of American metaphor, now felt himself at home. "Well, no. It's not unusual. In one of those books yonder there is the record of a case where a man, who had committed a series of nameless atrocities, extending over a period of years, absolutely kept a memorandum of them in his pocket diary. It was produced in Court. Why, my dear fellow, one half our business arises from the fact that men and women are in the habit of keeping letters and documents that they might — I don't say, you know, that they *ought*, that's a question of sentiment or ethics — but that they *might* destroy."

Thatcher, half-mechanically, took the telegram of poor Carmen and threw it in the fire. Harlowe noticed the act and smiled.

"I'll venture to say, however, that there's nothing in the bag that *you* lost that need give you a moment's uneasiness. It's only your rascal or fool who carries with him that which makes him his own detective.

"I had a friend," continued Harlowe, "a clever fellow enough, but who was so foolish as to seriously complicate himself with a woman. He was himself the soul of honor, and at the beginning of their correspondence he proposed

that they should each return the other's letters with their answer. They did so for years, but it cost him ten thousand dollars and no end of trouble, after all."

"Why?" asked Thatcher simply.

"Because he was such an egotistical ass as *to keep the letter proposing it*, which she had duly returned, among his papers as a sentimental record. Of course somebody eventually found it."

"Good-night," said Thatcher, rising abruptly. "If I stayed here much longer, I should begin to disbelieve my own mother."

"I have known of such hereditary traits," returned Harlowe, with a laugh. "But come, you must not go without the champagne." He led the way to the adjacent room, which proved to be only the antechamber of another, on the threshold of which Thatcher stopped with genuine surprise. It was an elegantly furnished library.

"Sybarite! Why was I never here before?"

"Because you came as a client; to-night you are my guest. All who enter here leave their business, with their hats, in the hall. Look; there is n't a law-book on those shelves; that table never was defaced by a title-deed or parchment. You look puzzled? Well, it was a whim of mine to put my residence and my workshop under the same roof, yet so distinct that they would never interfere with each other. You know the house above is let out to lodgers. I occupy the first floor with my mother and sister, and this is my parlor. I do my work in that severe room that fronts the street; here is where I play. A man must have something else in life than mere business. I find it less harmful and expensive to have my pleasure here."

Thatcher had sunk moodily in the embracing arms of an easy chair. He was thinking deeply; he was fond of books too, and like all men who have fared hard and led wandering lives, he knew the value of cultivated repose. Like all

men who have been obliged to sleep under blankets and in the open air, he appreciated the luxuries of linen sheets and a frescoed roof. It is, by the way, only your sick city clerk or your dyspeptic clergyman, who fancy that they have found in the bad bread, fried steaks and frowzy flannels of mountain picnicking the true art of living. And it is a somewhat notable fact that your true mountaineer or your gentleman who has been obliged to honestly "rough it," do not, as a general thing, write books about its advantages or implore their fellow mortals to come and share their solitude and their discomforts.

Thoroughly appreciating the taste and comfort of Harlowe's library, yet half envious of its owner, and half suspicious that his own earnest life for the past few years might have been different, Thatcher suddenly started from his seat and walked towards a parlor easel, whereon stood a picture. It was Carmen de Haro's first sketch of the furnace and the Mine.

"I see you are taken with that picture," said Harlowe, pausing with the champagne bottle in his hand. "You show your good taste. It 's been much admired. Observe how splendidly that firelight plays over the sleeping face of that figure, yet brings out by very contrast its almost death-like repose. Those rocks are powerfully handled; what a suggestion of mystery in those shadows? You know the painter?"

Thatcher murmured "Miss de Haro," with a new and rather odd self-consciousness in speaking her name.

"Yes. And you know the story of the picture, of course?"

Thatcher thought he did n't—well no, in fact, he did not remember.

"Why, this recumbent figure was an old Spanish lover of hers, whom she believed to have been murdered there. It 's a ghastly fancy, ain't it?"

Two things annoyed Thatcher; first, the epithet "lover," as applied to Concho by another man; second, that the picture belonged to him; and what the d — l did she mean by —

"Yes," he broke out finally, "but how did *you* get it?"

"Oh, I bought it of her. I've been a sort of patron of hers ever since I found out how she stood toward us. As she was quite alone here in Washington, my mother and sister have taken her up, and have been doing the social thing."

"How long since?" asked Thatcher.

"Oh, not long. The day she telegraphed you she came here to know what she could do for us, and when I said nothing could be done except to keep Congress off — why, she went and *did it*. For *she*, and she alone, got that speech out of the Senator. But," he added, a little mischievously, "you seem to know very little about her?"

"No! — I — that is — I've been very busy lately," returned Thatcher, staring at the picture, "does she come here often?"

"Yes, lately, quite often; she was here this evening with mother — was here, I think, when you came."

Thatcher looked intently at Harlowe. But that gentleman's face betrayed no confusion. Thatcher refilled his glass a little awkwardly, tossed off the liquor at a draught, and rose to his feet.

"Come, old fellow, you're not going now, I shan't permit it," said Harlowe, laying his hand kindly on his client's shoulder. "You're out of sorts! Stay here with me to-night. Our accommodations are not large, but are elastic. I can bestow you comfortably until morning. Wait here a moment while I give the necessary orders."

Thatcher was not sorry to be left alone. In the last half-hour he had become convinced that his love for Carmen de Haro had been in some way most dreadfully

abused. While *he* was hard at work in California, she was being introduced in Washington society by parties with eligible brothers who bought her paintings. It is a relief to the truly jealous mind to indulge in plurals. Thatcher liked to think that she was already beset by hundreds of brothers.

He still kept staring at the picture. By and by it faded away in part, and a very vivid recollection of the misty, midnight, moonlit walk he had once taken with her came back and refilled the canvas with its magic. He saw the ruined furnace; the dark, overhanging masses of rock, the trembling intricacies of foliage, and, above all, the flash of dark eyes under a mantilla at his shoulder. What a fool he had been! Had he not really been as senseless and stupid as this very Concho, lying here like a log. And she had loved that man. What a fool she must have thought him that evening! What a snob she must think him now!

He was startled by a slight rustling in the passage, that ceased almost as he turned. Thatcher looked towards the door of the outer office, as if half expecting that the Lord Chancellor, like the commander in Don Juan, might have accepted his thoughtless invitation. He listened again; everything was still. He was conscious of feeling ill at ease and a trifle nervous. What a long time Harlowe took to make his preparations. He would look out in the hall. To do this it was necessary to turn up the gas. He did so, and in his confusion turned it out!

Where were the matches? He remembered that there was a bronze Something on the table that, in the irony of modern decorative taste, might hold ashes or matches, or anything of an unpicturesque character. He knocked something over, evidently the ink, something else — this time a champagne glass. Becoming reckless and now groping at random in the ruins, he overturned the bronze

Mercury on the centre table, and then sat down hopelessly in his chair. And then a pair of velvet fingers slid into his with the matches, and this audible, musical statement —

"It is a match you are seeking? Here is of them."

Thatcher flushed, embarrassed, nervous — feeling the ridiculousness of saying "Thank you" to a dark Somebody — struck the match, beheld by its brief, uncertain glimmer, Carmen de Haro beside him, burned his fingers, coughed, dropped the match, and was cast again into outer darkness.

"Let me try!"

Carmen struck a match, jumped briskly on the chair, lit the gas, jumped lightly down again and said, "You do like to sit in the dark — eh? So am I — sometimes, alone."

"Miss de Haro," said Thatcher, with sudden, honest earnestness, advancing with outstretched hands, "believe me, I am sincerely delighted, overjoyed again to meet" —

She had, however, quickly retreated as he approached, ensconcing herself behind the high back of a large antique chair, on the cushion of which she knelt. I regret to add also that she slapped his outstretched fingers a little sharply with her inevitable black fan as he still advanced.

"We are not in California. It is Washington. It is after midnight. I am a poor girl, and I have to lose — what you call — 'a character.' You shall sit over there," she pointed to the sofa, "and I shall sit here," she rested her boyish head on the top of the chair, "and we shall talk, for I have to speak to you — Don Royal."

Thatcher took the seat indicated, contritely, humbly, submissively. Carmen's little heart was touched. But she still went on over the back of the chair.

"Don Royal," she said, emphasizing each word with her fan at him, "before I saw you — ever knew of you — I was

a child. Yes, I was but a child! I was a bold, bad child — and I was what you call a — a — 'forgaire!'"

"A what?" asked Thatcher, hesitating between a smile and a sigh.

"A forgaire!" continued Carmen demurely. "I did of myself write the names of ozzer peoples;" when Carmen was excited she lost the control of the English tongue; "I did write just to please myself — it was my onkle that did make of it money — you understand, eh? Shall you not speak? Must I again hit you?"

"Go on," said Thatcher, laughing.

"I did find out, when I came to you at the Mine, that I had forged against you the name of Micheltorena. I to the lawyer went, and found that it was so — of a verity — so! so! all the time. Look at me not now, Don Royal — it is a 'forgaire' you stare at!"

"Carmen!"

"Hoosh! Shall I have to hit you again? I did overlook all the papers. I found the application; it was written by me. There."

She tossed over the back of her chair an envelope to Thatcher. He opened it.

"I see," he said gently, "you repossessed yourself of it!"

"What is that — 'r-r-r-e— possess?'"

"Why!" Thatcher hesitated — "you got possession of this paper — this innocent forgery — again."

"Oh! You think me a thief as well as a 'forgaire.' Go away! Get up. Get out."

"My dear girl" —

"Look at the paper! Will you? Oh, you Silly!"

Thatcher looked at the paper. In paper, handwriting, age and stamp it was identical with the formal, clerical application of Garcia for the grant. The indorsement of Micheltorena was unquestionably genuine. *But the appli-*

cation was made for Royal Thatcher. And his own signature was imitated to the life.

"I had but one letter of yours wiz your name," said Carmen apologetically — "and it was the best poor me could do."

"Why, you blessed little goose and angel," said Thatcher, with the bold, mixed metaphor of amatory genius, "don't you see" —

"Ah, you don't like it — it is not good?"

"My darling!"

"Hoosh! There is also an old cat upstairs. And now I have, here, a character. *Will* you sit down? Is it of a necessity that up and down you should walk and awaken the whole house. There!" she had given him a vicious dab with her fan as he passed.

He sat down.

"And you have not seen me nor written to me for a year?"

"Carmen!"

"Sit down, you bold, bad boy. Don't you see it is of business that you and I talk down here, and it is of business that ozzer people upstairs are thinking. Eh?"

"D—n business! See here, Carmen, my darling, tell me" — I regret to say he had by this time got hold of the back of Carmen's chair — "tell me, my own little girl — about — about that Senator. You remember what you said to him?"

"Oh, the old man? Oh, *that* was business. And you say of business d—m."

"Carmen!"

"Don Royal!"

. . . . . .

Although Miss Carmen had recourse to her fan frequently during this interview, the air must have been chilly. For, a moment later, on his way downstairs, poor Harlowe,

a sufferer from bronchitis, was attacked with a violent fit of coughing, which troubled him all the way down.

"Well," he said, as he entered the room, "I see you have found Mr. Thatcher and shown those papers. I trust you have, for you've certainly had time enough. I am sent by my mother to dismiss you all to bed."

Carmen, still in the arm-chair, covered with her mantilla, did not speak.

"I suppose you are by this time lawyer enough to know," continued Harlowe, "that Miss De Haro's papers, though ingenious, are not legally available, unless" —

"I chose to make her a witness. Harlowe! you're a good fellow! I don't mind saying to you that these are papers I prefer my *wife* should not use. We'll leave it for the present — Unfinished Business."

They did. But one evening our hero brought Mrs. Royal Thatcher a paper containing a touching and beautiful tribute to the dead Senator.

"There, Carmen, love, read that. Don't you feel a little ashamed of your — your — your lobbying" —

"No," said Carmen promptly. "It was business — and, if all lobbying business was as honest — well?"

THE TWINS OF TABLE MOUNTAIN

PART I

A CLOUD ON THE MOUNTAIN

THEY lived on the verge of a vast stony level, upheaved so far above the surrounding country that its vague outlines, viewed from the nearest valley, seemed a mere cloud-streak resting upon the lesser hills. The rush and roar of the turbulent river that washed its eastern base were lost at that height; the winds that strove with the giant pines that half-way climbed its flanks spent their fury below the summit. For, at variance with most meteorological speculation, an eternal calm seemed to invest this serene altitude. The few Alpine flowers seldom thrilled their petals to a passing breeze; rain and snow fell alike perpendicularly, heavily, and monotonously over the granite boulders scattered along its brown expanse. Although by actual measurement an inconsiderable elevation of the Sierran range, and a mere shoulder of the nearest white-faced peak that glimmered in the west, it seemed to lie so near the quiet, passionless stars that at night it caught something of their calm remoteness. The articulate utterance of such a locality should have been a whisper; a laugh or exclamation was discordant, and the ordinary tones of the human voice on the night of the 15th of May, 1868, had a grotesque incongruity.

In the thick darkness that clothed the mountain that night, the human figure would have been lost or confounded with the outlines of outlying boulders, which at such times

took upon themselves the vague semblance of men and animals. Hence the voices in the following colloquy seemed the more grotesque and incongruous from being the apparent expression of an upright monolith, ten feet high, on the right, and another mass of granite that, reclining, peeped over the verge.

"Hello!"

"Hello yourself!"

"You 're late."

"I lost the trail, and climbed up the slide."

Here followed a stumble, the clatter of stones down the mountain side, and an oath, so very human and undignified that it at once relieved the boulders of any complicity of expression. The voices, too, were close together now, and unexpectedly in quite another locality.

"Anything up?"

"Looey Napoleon 's declared war agin Germany!"

"Sho-o-o!"

Notwithstanding this exclamation, the interest of the latter speaker was evidently only polite and perfunctory. What, indeed, were the political convulsions of the Old World to the dwellers in this serene, isolated eminence of the New?

"I reckon it 's so," continued the first voice; "French Pete and that thar feller that keeps the Dutch grocery hev hed a row over it. Emptied their six-shooters into each other. The Dutchman 's got two balls in his leg, and the Frenchman 's got an onnessary button-hole in his shirt buzzum, and hez caved in."

This concise, local corroboration of the conflict of remote nations, however confirmatory, did not appear to excite any further interest. Even the last speaker, now that he was in this calm, dispassionate atmosphere, seemed to lose his own concern in his tidings, and to have abandoned everything of a sensational and lower-worldly character in

the pines below. There was a few moments of absolute silence, and then another stumble. But now the voices of both speakers were quite patient and philosophical.

"Hold on, and I'll strike a light," said the second speaker. "I brought a lantern along, but I did n't light up. I kem out afore sundown, and you know how it allers is up yer. *I* did n't want it, and did n't keer to light up. I forgot you 're always a little dazed and strange-like when you first come up."

There was a crackle, a flash, and presently a steady glow which the surrounding darkness seemed to resent. The faces of the two men thus revealed were singularly alike. The same thin, narrow outline of jaw and temple; the same dark, grave eyes; the same brown growth of curly beard and moustache, which concealed the mouth, and hid what might have been any individual idiosyncrasy of thought or expression, showed them to be brothers, or better known as the "Twins of Table Mountain." A certain animation in the face of the second speaker — the first comer — a certain light in his eye, might have at first distinguished him; but even this faded out in the steady glow of the lantern, and had no value as a permanent distinction, for by the time they had reached the western verge of the mountain, the two faces had settled into a homogeneous calmness and melancholy. The vague horizon of darkness that, a few feet from the lantern, still encompassed them, gave no indication of their progress until their feet actually trod the rude planks and thatch that formed the roof of their habitation. For their cabin half burrowed in the mountain, and half clung, like a swallow's nest, to the side of the deep declivity that terminated the northern limit of the summit. Had it not been for the windlass of a shaft, a coil of rope, and a few heaps of stone and gravel, which were the only indications of human labor in that stony field, there was nothing to interrupt its monotonous dead

level. And when they descended a dozen well-worn steps to the door of their cabin, they left the summit as before, lonely, silent, motionless, uninterrupted, basking in the cold light of the stars.

The simile of a "nest," as applied to the cabin of the brothers, was no mere figure of speech, as the light of the lantern first flashed upon it. The narrow ledge before the door was strewn with feathers. A suggestion that it might be the home and haunt of predatory birds was promptly checked by the spectacle of the nailed-up carcases of a dozen hawks against the walls, and the outspread wings of an extended eagle emblazoning the gable above the door, like an armorial bearing. Within the cabin the walls and chimney-piece were dazzlingly bedecked with the parti-colored wings of jays, yellow-birds, woodpeckers, king-fishers, and the poly-tinted wood-duck. Yet in that dry, highly rarefied atmosphere there was not the slightest suggestion of odor or decay.

The first speaker hung the lantern upon a hook that dangled from the rafters, and going to the broad chimney, kicked the half-dead embers into a sudden resentful blaze. He then opened a rude cupboard, and without looking around, called "Ruth!"

The second speaker turned his head from the open doorway where he was leaning, as if listening to something in the darkness, and answered abstractedly —

"Rand!"

"I don't believe you have touched grub to-day!"

Ruth grunted out some indifferent reply.

"Thar hezent been a slice cut off that bacon since I left," continued Rand, bringing a side of bacon and some biscuits from the cupbord and applying himself to the discussion of them at the table. "You 're gettin' off yer feed, Ruth. What 's up?"

Ruth replied by taking an uninvited seat beside him, and

resting his chin on the palms of his hands. He did not eat, but simply transferred his inattention from the door to the table.

"You 're workin' too many hours in the shaft," continued Rand. "You 're always up to some such d—n fool business when I 'm not yer."

"I dipped a little west to-day," Ruth went on, without heeding the brotherly remonstrance, "and struck quartz and pyrites."

"Thet 's you! — allers dippin' west or east for quartz and the color, instead of keeping on plumb down to the 'cement!'"[1]

"We 've been three years digging for cement," said Ruth, more in abstraction than reproach; "three years!"

"And we may be three years more — may be only three days. Why, you could n't be more impatient if — if — if you lived in a valley."

Delivering this tremendous comparison as an unanswerable climax, Rand applied himself once more to his repast. Ruth, after a moment's pause, without speaking or looking up, disengaged his hand from under his chin and slid it along, palm uppermost, on the table beside his brother. Thereupon Rand slowly reached forward his left hand, the right being engaged in conveying victual to his mouth, and laid it on his brother's palm. The act was evidently an habitual, half-mechanical one, for in a few moments the hands were as gently disengaged, without comment or expression. At last Rand leaned back in his chair, laid down his knife and fork, and complacently loosening the belt that held his revolver, threw it and the weapon on his bed. Taking out his pipe, and chipping some tobacco on the table, he said carelessly, "I came a piece through the woods with Mornie just now." The face that Ruth turned upon his

[1] The local name for gold-bearing alluvial drift — the bed of a prehistoric river.

brother was very distinct in expression at that moment, and quite belied the popular theory that the twins could not be told apart. "Thet gal," continued Rand, without looking up, "is either flighty, or — or suthin'," he added, in vague disgust, pushing the table from him as if it were the lady in question. "Don't tell me!"

Ruth's eyes quickly sought his brother's, and were as quickly averted, as he asked hurriedly, "How?"

"What gets me," continued Rand in a petulant non sequitur, "is that *you*, my own twin brother, never lets on about her comin' yer, permiskus like, when I ain't yer, and you and her gallivantin' and promenadin', and swoppin' sentiments and mottoes."

Ruth tried to contradict his blushing face with a laugh of worldly indifference.

"She came up yer on a sort of pasear" —

"Oh yes! — a short cut to the creek," interpolated Rand satirically.

"Last Tuesday or Wednesday," continued Ruth, with affected forgetfulness.

"Oh, in course, Tuesday or Wednesday, or Thursday! You've so many folks climbing up this yer mountain to call on ye," continued the ironical Rand, "that you disremember; only you remembered enough not to tell me. *She* did! She took me for you, or pretended to."

The color dropped from Ruth's cheek.

"Took you for me?" he asked, with an awkward laugh.

"Yes," sneered Rand; "chirped and chattered away about *our* picnic, *our* nosegays, and Lord knows what! Said she'd keep them blue jay's wings, and wear 'em in her hat. Spouted poetry, too; the same sort o' rot you get off now and then."

Ruth laughed again, but rather ostentatiously and nervously.

"Ruth, look yer!"

Ruth faced his brother.

"What 's your little game? Do you mean to say you don't know what thet gal is? Do you mean to say you don't know that she 's the laughing-stock of the Ferry; thet her father 's a d—d old fool, and her mother 's a drunkard, and worse — thet she 's got any right to be hanging round yer? You can't mean to marry her, even if you kalkilate to turn me out to do it, for she would n't live alone with ye up yer. 'T ain't her kind. And if I thought you was thinking of" —

"What?" said Ruth, turning upon his brother quickly.

"Oh, thet 's right! Holler! Swear and yell, and break things, do! Tear round," continued Rand, kicking his boots off in a corner, "just because I ask you a civil question. That 's brotherly," he added, jerking his chair away against the side of the cabin, "ain't it?"

"She 's not to blame because her mother drinks, and her father 's a shyster," said Ruth, earnestly and strongly. "The men who make her the laughing-stock of the Ferry tried to make her something worse, and failed, and take this sneak's revenge on her. 'Laughing-stock!' Yes, they knew she could turn the tables on them."

"Of course; go on! She 's better than me; I know I 'm a fratricide, that 's what I am," said Rand, throwing himself on the upper of the two berths that formed the bedstead of the cabin.

"I 've seen her three times," continued Ruth.

"And you 've known me twenty years," interrupted his brother.

Ruth turned on his heel, and walked towards the door.

"That 's right; go on! Why don't you get the chalk?"

Ruth made no reply. Rand descended from the bed, and taking a piece of chalk from the shelf, drew a line on the floor, dividing the cabin in two equal parts.

"You can have the east half," he said, as he climbed slowly back into bed.

This mysterious rite was the usual termination of a quarrel between the twins. Each man kept his half of the cabin until the feud was forgotten. It was the mark of silence and separation, over which no words of recrimination, argument, or even explanation were delivered until it was effaced by one or the other. This was considered equivalent to apology or reconciliation, which each was equally bound in honor to accept.

It may be remarked that the floor was much whiter at this line of demarcation, and under the fresh chalk line appeared the faint evidences of one recently effaced.

Without apparently heeding this potential ceremony, Ruth remained leaning against the doorway, looking upon the night, the bulk of whose profundity and blackness seemed to be gathered below him. The vault above was serene and tranquil, with a few large far-spread stars; the abyss beneath, untroubled by sight or sound. Stepping out upon the ledge, he leaned far over the shelf that sustained their cabin, and listened. A faint rhythmical roll, rising and falling in long undulations against the invisible horizon, to his accustomed ears told him the wind was blowing among the pines in the valley. Yet, mingling with the familiar sound, his ear, now morbidly acute, seemed to detect a stranger inarticulate murmur, as of confused and excited voices, swelling up from the mysterious depths to the stars above, and again swallowed up in the gulfs of silence below. He was roused from a consideration of this phenomenon by a faint glow towards the east, which at last brightened, until the dark outline of the distant walls of the valley stood out against the sky. Were his other senses participating in the delusion of his ears? For with the brightening light came the faint odor of burning timber.

His face grew anxious as he gazed. At last he rose and

reëntered the cabin. His eyes fell upon the faint chalk mark, and taking his soft felt hat from his head, with a few practical sweeps of the brim, he brushed away the ominous record of their late estrangement. Going to the bed, whereon Rand lay stretched, open-eyed, he would have laid his hand upon his arm lightly, but the brother's fingers sought and clasped his own. "Get up," he said quietly; "there 's a strange fire in the Cañon head that I can't make out."

Rand slowly clambered from his shelf, and, hand in hand, the brothers stood upon the ledge. "It 's a right smart chance beyond the Ferry, and a piece beyond the Mill too," said Rand, shading his eyes with his hand from force of habit. "It 's in the woods where" — He would have added where he met Mornie, but it was a point of honor with the twins, after reconciliation, not to allude to any topic of their recent disagreement.

Ruth dropped his brother's hand. "It does n't smell like the woods," he said slowly.

"Smell!" repeated Rand incredulously. "Why, it 's twenty miles in a bee-line yonder. Smell, indeed!"

Ruth was silent, but presently fell to listening again with his former abstraction. "You don't hear anything — do you?" he asked, after a pause.

"It 's blowin' in the pines on the river," said Rand shortly.

"You don't hear anything else?"

"No."

"Nothing like — like — like" —

Rand, who had been listening with an intensity that distorted the left side of his face, interrupted him impatiently.

"Like what?"

"Like a woman sobbin'?"

"Ruth," said Rand, suddenly looking up in his brother's face, "what 's gone of you?"

Ruth laughed. "The fire 's out," he said abruptly reëntering the cabin. "I 'm going to turn in."

Rand, following his brother half reproachfully, saw him divest himself of his clothing and roll himself in the blankets of his bed.

"Good-night, Randy."

Rand hesitated. He would have liked to ask his brother another question; but there was clearly nothing to be done but follow his example.

"Good-night, Ruthy," he said, and put out the light. As he did so the glow in the eastern horizon faded too, and darkness seemed to well up from the depths below, and, flowing in the open door, wrapped them in deeper slumber.

PART II

THE CLOUDS GATHER

TWELVE months had elapsed since the quarrel and reconciliation, during which interval no reference was made by either of the brothers to the cause which had provoked it. Rand was at work in the shaft, Ruth having that morning undertaken the replenishment of the larder with game from the wooded skirt of the mountain. Rand had taken advantage of his brother's absence to "prospect" in the "drift" — a proceeding utterly at variance with his previous condemnation of all such speculative essay; but Rand, despite his assumption of a superior practical nature, was not above certain local superstitions. Having that morning put on his gray flannel shirt wrong side out, an abstraction recognized among the miners as the sure forerunner of divination and treasure discovery, he could not forego that opportunity of trying his luck without hazarding a dangerous example. He was also conscious of feeling "chipper," another local expression for buoyancy of spirit, not common to men who work fifty feet below the surface, without the stimulus of air and sunshine, and not to be overlooked as an important factor in fortunate adventure. Nevertheless, noon came without the discovery of any treasure; he had attacked the walls on either side of the lateral "drift" skillfully, so as to expose their quality, without destroying their cohesive integrity, but had found nothing. Once or twice, returning to the shaft for rest and air, its grim silence had seemed to him pervaded with some vague echo of cheerful holiday voices above. This set him to thinking of his

brother's equally extravagant fancy of the wailing voices in the air on the night of the fire, and of his attributing it to a lover's abstraction.

"I laid it to his being struck after that gal, and yet," Rand continued to himself, "here's me, who have n't been foolin' round no gal, and dog my skin if I did n't think I heard one singin' up thar!" He put his foot on the lower round of the ladder, paused, and slowly ascended a dozen steps. Here he paused again. All at once the whole shaft was filled with the musical vibrations of a woman's song. Seizing the rope that hung idly from the windlass, he half climbed, half swung himself to the surface.

The voice was there, but the sudden transition to the dazzling level before him at first blinded his eyes; so that he took in, only by degrees, the unwonted spectacle of the singer — a pretty girl standing on tiptoe on a boulder, not a dozen yards from him, utterly absorbed in tying a gayly striped neckerchief, evidently taken from her own plump throat, to the halliards of a freshly cut hickory pole, newly reared as a flag-staff beside her. The hickory pole, the halliards, the fluttering scarf, the young lady herself, were all glaring innovations on the familiar landscape; but Rand with his hand still on the rope, silently and demurely enjoyed it.

For the better understanding of the general reader, who does not live on an isolated mountain, it may be observed that the young lady's position on the rock exhibited some study of pose, and a certain exaggeration of attitude that betrayed the habit of an audience; also that her voice had an artificial accent that was not wholly unconscious even in this lofty soltitude. Yet the very next moment, when she turned and caught Rand's eye fixed upon her, she started naturally, colored slightly, uttered that feminine adjuration, "Good Lord! gracious! goodness me!" which is seldom used in reference to its effect upon the hearer, and skipped

instantly from the boulder to the ground. Here, however, she alighted in a pose — brought the right heel of her neatly fitting left boot closely into the hollowed side of her right instep; at the same moment deftly caught her flying skirt, whipped it around her ankles, and slightly raising it behind, permitted the chaste display of an inch or two of frilled white petticoat. The most irreverent critic of the sex will, I think, admit that it has some movements that are automatic.

"Hope I did n't disturb ye," said Rand, pointing to the flag-staff.

The young lady slightly turned her head. "No," she said; "but I did n't know anybody was here, of course. Our *party*" — she emphasized the word, and accompanied it with a look toward the farther extremity of the plateau, to show she was not alone — "our party climbed this ridge, and put up this pole as a sign they did it." The ridiculous self-complacency of this record in the face of a man who was evidently a dweller on the mountain, apparently struck her for the first time. "We did n't know," she stammered, looking at the shaft from which Rand had emerged, "that — that" — She stopped, and glancing again towards the distant range where her friends had disappeared, began to edge away.

"They can't be far off," interposed Rand quietly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for the lady to be there; "Table Mountain ain't as big as all that. Don't you be scared! So you thought nobody lived up here?"

She turned upon him a pair of honest hazel eyes, which not only contradicted the somewhat meretricious smartness of her dress, but was utterly inconsistent with the palpable artificial color of her hair — an obvious imitation of a certain popular fashion then known in artistic circles as the "British Blonde," — and began to ostentatiously resume a

pair of lemon-colored kid gloves. Having, as it were, thus indicated her standing and respectability, and put an immeasurable distance between herself and her bold interlocutor, she said impressively, "We evidently made a mistake; I will rejoin our party, who will, of course, apologize."

"What's your hurry?" said the imperturbable Rand, disengaging himself from the rope and walking towards her. "As long as you 're up here, you might stop a spell."

"I have no wish to intrude — that is, our party certainly has not," continued the young lady, pulling the tight gloves and smoothing the plump, almost bursting fingers, with an affectation of fashionable ease.

"Oh, I have n't anything to do just now," said Rand, "and it 's about grub time, I reckon. Yes, I live here, Ruth and me; right here."

The young woman glanced at the shaft.

"No, not down there," said Rand, following her eye, with a laugh. "Come here, and I 'll show you."

A strong desire to keep up an appearance of genteel reserve, and an equally strong inclination to enjoy the adventurous company of this good-looking, hearty young fellow, made her hesitate. Perhaps she regretted having undertaken a role of such dignity at the beginning; she could have been so perfectly natural with this perfectly natural man, whereas, any relaxation now might increase his familiarity. And yet she was not without a vague suspicion that her dignity and her gloves were alike thrown away on him — a fact made the more evident when Rand stepped to her side, and without any apparent consciousness of disrespect or gallantry, laid his large hand, half persuasively, half fraternally upon her shoulder, and said, "Oh, come along, do."

The simple act either exceeded the limits of her forbearance or decided the course of her subsequent behavior.

She instantly stepped back a single pace, and drew her left foot slowly and deliberately after her. Then she fixed her eyes and uplifted eyebrows upon the daring hand, and taking it by the ends of her thumb and forefinger, lifted it and dropped it in mid-air. She then folded her arms. It was the indignant gesture with which "Alice," the Pride of Dumballin Village, received the loathsome advances of the bloated aristocrat, Sir Parkyns Parkyn, and had at Marysville, a few nights before, brought down the house.

This effect was, I think, however, lost upon Rand. The slight color that rose to his cheek as he looked down upon his clay-soiled hands, was due to the belief that he had really contaminated her outward superfine person. But his color quickly passed, his frank, boyish smile returned, as he said, "It 'll rub off. Lord, don't mind that. Thar, now — come on!"

The young woman bit her lip. Then nature triumphed, and she laughed, although a little scornfully. And then Providence assisted her with the sudden presentation of two figures — a man and woman slowly climbing up over the mountain verge, not far from them. With a cry of, "There 's Sol, now," she forgot her dignity and her confusion, and ran towards them.

Rand stood looking after her neat figure, less concerned in the advent of the strangers than in her sudden caprice. He was not so young and inexperienced but that he noted certain ambiguities in her dress and manner; he was by no means impressed by her dignity. But he could not help watching her as she appeared to be volubly recounting her late interview to her companions; and still unconscious of any impropriety or obtrusiveness, he lounged down lazily towards her. Her humor had evidently changed, for she turned an honest pleased face upon him, as she girlishly attempted to drag the strangers forward.

The man was plump and short; unlike the natives of the

locality, he was closely cropped and shaven, as if to keep down the strong blue-blackness of his beard and hair, which nevertheless asserted itself over his round cheeks and upper lip like a tattooing of Indian ink. The woman at his side was reserved and indistinctive, with that appearance of being an unenthusiastic family servant peculiar to some men's wives. When Rand was within a few feet of him, he started, struck a theatrical attitude, and shading his eyes with his hand, cried, "What, do me eyes deceive me!" burst into a hearty laugh, darted forward, seized Rand's hand and shook it briskly.

"Pinkney! Pinkney, my boy, how are you? And this is your little 'prop'? your quarter-section, your country seat, that we've been trespassing on — eh? A nice little spot — cool, sequestered, remote! A trifle unimproved: carriage road as yet unfinished — ha! ha! But to think of our making a discovery of this inaccessible mountain; climbing it, sir, for two mortal hours; christening it 'Sol's Peak;' getting up a flag-pole, unfurling our standard to the breeze, sir, and then, by Jingo, winding up by finding Pinkney — the festive Pinkney — living on it at home!"

Completely surprised, but still perfectly good-humored, Rand shook one of the stranger's hands warmly, and received on his broad shoulders a welcoming thwack from the other, without question. "She don't mind her friends making free with *me*, evidently," said Rand to himself, as he tried to suggest that fact to the young lady in a meaning glance.

The stranger noted his glance, and suddenly passed his hand thoughtfully over his shaven cheeks. "No!" he said. "Yes, surely, I forget! Yes, I see; of course you don't. Rosy," turning to his wife, "of course, Pinkney does n't know Phemie — eh?"

"No, nor *me* either, Sol," said that lady warningly.

"Certainly," continued Sol. "It 's his misfortune!

You were n't with me at Gold Hill. Allow me," he said, turning to Rand, "to present Mrs. Sol Saunders, wife of the undersigned, and Miss Euphemia Neville, otherwise known as the 'Marysville Pet,' the best variety-actress known on the provincial boards. Played Ophelia at Marysville, Friday; domestic drama at Gold Hill, Saturday; Sunday night, four songs in character, different dress each time, and a clog-dance. The best clog-dance on the Pacific Slope," he added, in a stage aside, "The minstrels are crazy to get her in 'Frisco. But money can't buy her — prefers the legitimate drama to this sort of thing." Here he took a few steps of a jig, to which the Marysville Pet beat time with her feet, and concluded with a laugh and a wink — the combined expression of an artist's admiration for her ability, and a man of the world's skepticism of feminine ambition.

Miss Euphemia responded to the formal introduction by extending her hand frankly with a reassuring smile to Rand, and an utter obliviousness of her former hauteur. Rand shook it warmly, and then dropped carelessly on a rock beside them.

"And you never told me you lived up here in the attic, you rascal," continued Sol with a laugh.

"No," replied Rand simply. "How could I? I never saw you before, that I remember."

Miss Euphemia stared at Sol. Mrs. Sol looked up in her lord's face, and folded her arms in a resigned expression. Sol rose to his feet again, and shaded his eyes with his hand, but this time quite seriously, and gazed at Rand's smiling face.

"Good Lord! Do you mean to say your name is n't Pinkney?" he asked, with a half-embarrassed laugh.

"It *is* Pinkney," said Rand, "but I never met you before."

"Did n't you come to see a young lady that joined my

troupe at Gold Hill, last month, and say you 'd meet me at Keeler's Ferry in a day or two ? "

"No-o-o," said Rand, with a good-humored laugh. "I have n't left this mountain for two months."

He might have added more, but his attention was directed to Miss Euphemia, who during this short dialogue, having stuffed alternately her handkerchief, the corner of her mantle, and her gloves into her mouth, restrained herself no longer, but gave way to an uncontrollable fit of laughter. "O Sol," she gasped explanatorily, as she threw herself alternately against him, Mrs. Sol, and a boulder, "you 'll kill me yet! O Lord! first we take possession of this man's property, then we claim *him.*" The contemplation of this humorous climax affected her so that she was fain at last to walk away and confide the rest of her speech to space.

Sol joined in the laugh until his wife plucked his sleeve, and whispered something in his ear. In an instant his face became at once mysterious and demure. "I owe you an apology," he said, turning to Rand, but in a voice ostentatiously pitched high enough for Miss Euphemia to overhear; "I see I have made a mistake. A resemblance — only a mere resemblance, as I look at you now — led me astray. Of course you don't know any young lady in the profession ? "

"Of course he does n't, Sol," said Miss Euphemia. "*I* could have told you that. He did n't even know *me!*"

The voice and mock-heroic attitude of the speaker was enough to relieve the general embarrassment with a laugh. Rand, now pleasantly conscious of only Miss Euphemia's presence, again offered the hospitality of his cabin — with the polite recognition of her friends in the sentence, "and you might as well come along too!"

"But won't we incommode the lady of the house ? " said Mrs. Sol politely.

"What lady of the house?" said Rand, almost angrily.

"Why — Ruth, you know!"

It was Rand's turn to become hilarious. "Ruth," he said, "is short for Rutherford, my brother." His laugh, however, was echoed only by Euphemia.

"Then you have a brother?" said Mrs. Sol benignly.

"Yes," said Rand; "he will be here soon." A sudden thought dropped the color from his cheek. "Look here," he said, turning impulsively upon Sol. "I have a brother, a twin brother. It could n't be *him*" —

Sol was conscious of a significant feminine pressure on his right arm. He was equal to the emergency. "I think not," he said dubiously, "unless your brother's hair is much darker than yours. Yes! now I look at you, yours is brown. He has a mole on his right cheek — has n't he?"

The red came quickly back to Rand's boyish face. He laughed. "No, sir; my brother's hair is, if anything, a shade lighter than mine; and nary mole! Come along!"

And leading the way, Rand disclosed the narrow steps winding down to the shelf on which the cabin hung. "Be careful," said Rand, taking the now unresisting hand of the "Marysville Pet" as they descended: "a step that way, and down you go, two thousand feet on the top of a pine-tree."

But the girl's slight cry of alarm was presently changed to one of unaffected pleasure, as they stood on the rocky platform. "It is n't a house; it 's a *nest*, and the loveliest!" said Euphemia breathlessly.

"It 's a scene! a perfect scene, sir!" said Sol enraptured. "I shall take the liberty of bringing my scene-painter to sketch it, some day. It would do for 'The Mountaineer's Bride' superbly, or," continued the little man, warming through the blue-black border of his face with professional enthusiasm, "it 's enough to make a play itself! 'The Cot on the Crags.' Last scene — moonlight — the struggle on the ledge! — The Lady of the Crags throws herself from

the beetling heights! — A shriek from the depths — a woman's wail!"

"Dry up!" sharply interrupted Rand, to whom this speech recalled his brother's half-forgotten strangeness, "Look at the prospect."

In the full noon of a cloudless day, beneath them a tumultuous sea of pines surged, heaved, rode in giant crests, stretched and spent itself in the ghostly, snow-peaked horizon. The thronging woods choked every defile, swept every crest, filled every valley with its dark-green tilting spears, and left only Table Mountain sunlit and bare. Here and there were profound olive depths, over which the gray hawk hung lazily, and into which blue jays dipped. A faint, dull, yellowish streak marked an occasional water-course; a deeper reddish ribbon, the mountain road and its overhanging murky cloud of dust.

"Is it quite safe here?" asked Mrs. Sol, eyeing the little cabin. "I mean from storms?"

"It never blows up here," replied Rand, "and nothing happens."

"It must be lovely!" said Euphemia, clasping her hands.

"It *is* that," said Rand proudly. "It 's four years since Ruth and I took up this yer claim, and raised this shanty. In that four years we have n't left it alone a night, or cared to. It 's only big enough for two, and them two must be brothers. It would n't do for mere pardners to live here alone — they could n't do it. It would n't be exactly the thing for man and wife to shut themselves up here alone. But Ruth and me know each other's ways, and here we 'll stay until we 've made a pile. We sometimes — one of us — takes a pasear to the Ferry, to buy provisions, but we 're glad to crawl up to the back of old 'Table' at night."

"You 're quite out of the world here, then?" suggested Mrs. Sol.

"That 's it — just it! We 're out of the world, out of

rows, out of liquor, out of cards, out of bad company, out of temptation. Cussedness and foolishness hez got to follow us up here to find us, and there 's too many ready to climb down to them things to tempt 'em to come up to us."

There was a little boyish conceit in his tone, as he stood there, not altogether unbecoming his fresh color and simplicity. Yet when his eyes met those of Miss Euphemia, he colored, he hardly knew why, and the young lady herself blushed rosily.

When the neat cabin, with its decorated walls, and squirrel and wild-cat skins were duly admired, the luncheon-basket of the Saunders party was reinforced by provisions from Rand's larder, and spread upon the ledge; the dimensions of the cabin not admitting four. Under the potent influence of a bottle, Sol became hilarious and professional. The "Pet" was induced to favor the company with a recitation, and, under the plea of teaching Rand, to perform the clog-dance with both gentlemen. Then there was an interval, in which Rand and Euphemia wandered a little way down the mountain side to gather laurel, leaving Mr. Sol to his siesta on a rock, and Mrs. Sol to take some knitting from the basket, and sit beside him.

When Rand and his companion had disappeared, Mrs. Sol nudged her sleeping partner. "Do you think that *was* the brother?"

Sol yawned. "Sure of it. They 're as like as two peas, in looks."

"Why did n't you tell him so, then?"

"Will you tell me, my dear, why you stopped me when I began?"

"Because something was said about Ruth being here and I supposed Ruth was a woman, and perhaps Pinkney's wife, and I knew you 'd be putting your foot in it by talking of that other woman. I supposed it was for fear of that he denied knowing you."

"Well, when *he*, — this Rand, — told me he had a twin brother, he looked so frightened that I knew he knew nothing of his brother's doings with that woman, and I threw him off the scent. He 's a good fellow, but awfully green, and I didn't want to worry him with tales. I like him, and I think Phemie does too."

"Nonsense! He 's a conceited prig! Did you hear his sermon on the world and its temptations? I wonder if he thought temptation had come up to him in the person of us professionals, out on a picnic? I think it positively rude."

"My dear woman, you 're always seeing slights and insults. I tell you, he 's taken a shine to Phemie, and he 's as good as four seats and a bouquet to that child next Wednesday evening. To say nothing of the éclat of getting this St. Simeon — what do you call him — Stalactites?"

"Stylites," suggested Mrs. Sol.

"Stylites, off from his pillar here. I'll have a paragraph in the paper, that the hermit crabs of Table Mountain" —

"Don't be a fool, Sol!"

"The hermit twins of Table Mountain bespoke the chaste performance."

"One of them being the protector of the well-known Mornie Nixon," responded Mrs. Sol, viciously accenting the name with her knitting-needles.

"Rosy, you 're unjust. You 're prejudiced by the reports of the town. Mr. Pinkney's interest in her may be a purely artistic one, although mistaken. She 'll never make a good variety-actress — she 's too heavy. And the boys don't give her a fair show. No woman can make a début in my version of 'Somnambula,' and have the front row in the pit say to her, in the sleep-walking scene, 'You 're out rather late, Mornie. Kinder forgot to put on your things, did n't you? Mother sick, I suppose, and you 're goin' for more gin? Hurry along, or you 'll ketch it when ye get home.' Why, you could n't do it yourself, Rosy!"

To which Mrs. Sol's illogical climax was that, "bad as Rutherford might be, this Sunday-school superintendent, Rand, was worse."

Rand and his companion returned late, but in high spirits. There was an unnecessary effusiveness in the way in which Euphemia kissed Mrs. Sol — the one woman present, who *understood*, and was to be propitiated — which did not tend to increase her good humor. She had her basket packed already for departure, and even the earnest solicitation of Rand, that they would defer their going until sunset, produced no effect.

"Mr. Rand — Mr. Pinkney, I mean, says the sunsets here are so lovely," pleaded Euphemia.

"There is a rehearsal at seven o'clock, and we have no time to lose," said Mrs. Sol significantly.

"I forgot to say," said the Marysville Pet timidly, glancing at Mrs. Sol, "that Mr. Rand says he will bring his brother on Wednesday night, and wants four seats in front, so as not to be crowded."

Sol shook the young man's hand warmly. "You 'll not regret it, sir; it 's a surprising, a remarkable performance."

"I 'd like to go a piece down the mountain with you," said Rand with evident sincerity, looking at Miss Euphemia; "but Ruth is n't here yet, and we make a rule never to leave the place alone. I 'll show you the slide: it 's the quickest way to go down. If you meet any one who looks like me, and talks like me, call him 'Ruth,' and tell him I 'm waitin for him yer."

Miss Phemia, the last to go, standing on the verge of the declivity, here remarked, with a dangerous smile, that if she met any one who bore that resemblance, she might be tempted to keep him with her — a playfulness that brought the ready color to Rand's cheek. When she added to this the greater audacity of kissing her hand to him, the young hermit actually turned away in sheer embarrassment. When

he looked around again, she was gone, and for the first time in his experience, the mountain seemed barren and lonely.

The too sympathetic reader who would rashly deduce from this any newly awakened sentiment in the virgin heart of Rand would quite misapprehend that peculiar young man. That singular mixture of boyish inexperience and mature doubt and disbelief, which was partly the result of his temperament, and partly of his cloistered life on the mountain, made him regard his late companions, now that they were gone, and his intimacy with them, with remorseful distrust. The mountain was barren and lonely, because it was no longer *his*. It had become a part of the great world which, four years ago, he and his brother had put aside; and in which, as two self-devoted men, they walked alone. More than that, he believed he had acquried some understanding of the temptations that assailed his brother, and the poor little vanities of the "Marysville Pet" were transformed into the blandishments of a Circe. Rand, who would have succumbed to a wicked, superior woman, believed he was a saint in withstanding the foolish weakness of a simple one.

He did not resume his work that day. He paced the mountain, anxiously awaiting his brother's return, and eager to relate his experiences. He would go with him to the dramatic entertainment; from his example and wisdom Ruth should learn how easily temptation might be overcome. But, first of all, there should be the fullest exchange of confidences and explanations. The old rule should be rescinded for once — the old discussion in regard to Mornie re-opened; and Rand, having convinced his brother of error, would generously extend his forgiveness.

The sun sank redly. Lingering long upon the ledge before their cabin, it at last slipped away almost imperceptibly, leaving Rand still wrapped in reverie. Darkness, the smoke of distant fires in the woods, and the faint evening incense

of the pines crept slowly up, but Ruth came not. The moon rose — a silver gleam on the farther ridge; and Rand, becoming uneasy at his brother's prolonged absence, resolved to break another custom and leave the summit, to seek him on the trail. He buckled on his revolver, seized his gun, when a cry from the depths arrested him. He leaned over the ledge and listened. Again the cry arose, and this time more distinctly. He held his breath; the blood settled round his heart in superstitious terror. It was the wailing voice of a woman!

"Ruth! Ruth! for God's sake come and help me!"

The blood flew back hotly to Rand's cheek. It was Mornie's voice! By leaning over the ledge he could distinguish something moving along the almost precipitous face of the cliff, where an abandoned trail, long since broken off and disrupted by the fall of a portion of the ledge, stopped abruptly a hundred feet below him. Rand knew the trail, a dangerous one always; in its present condition a single misstep would be fatal. Would she make that misstep? He shook off a horrible temptation that seemed to be sealing his lips and paralyzing his limbs, and almost screamed to her, "Drop on your face, hang on to the chapparal, and don't move!" In another instant, with a coil of rope around his arm, he was dashing down the almost perpendicular "slide." When he had nearly reached the level of the abandoned trail, he fastened one end of the rope to a jutting splinter of granite, and began to "lay out," and work his way laterally along the face of the mountain. Presently he struck the regular trail at the point from which the woman must have diverged.

"It is Rand!" she said, without lifting her head.

"It is," replied Rand coldly. "Pass the rope under your arms, and I'll get you back to the trail."

"Where is Ruth?" she demanded again, without moving. She was trembling, but with excitement rather than fear.

"I don't know," returned Rand impatiently. "Come! the ledge is already crumbling beneath our feet."

"Let it crumble!" said the woman passionately.

Rand surveyed her with profound disgust, then passed the rope around her waist, and half lifted, half swung her from her feet. In a few moments she began to mechanically help herself, and permitted him to guide her to a place of safety. That reached, she sank down again.

The rising moon shone full upon her face and figure. Through his growing indignation Rand was still impressed and even startled with the change the last few months had wrought upon her. In place of the silly, fanciful, half-hysterical hoyden whom he had known, a matured woman, strong in passionate self-will, fascinating in a kind of wild savage beauty, looked up at him as if to read his very soul.

"What are you staring at?" she said finally. "Why don't you help me on?"

"Where do you want to go?" said Rand quietly.

"Where! — up there!" — she pointed savagely to the top of the mountain, — "to *him!* Where else should I go?" she said, with a bitter laugh.

"I've told you he wasn't there," said Rand roughly. "He hasn't returned."

"I'll wait for him! — do you hear! — wait for him! Stay there till he comes! If you won't help me, I'll go alone!"

She made a step forward, but faltered, staggered, and was obliged to lean against the mountain for support. Stains of travel were on her dress; lines of fatigue and pain, and traces of burning, passionate tears, were on her face; her black hair flowed from beneath her gaudy bonnet; and shamed out of his brutality, Rand placed his strong arm round her waist, and, half carrying, half supporting her, began the ascent. Her head dropped wearily on his shoulder; her arm encircled his neck; her hair, as if caress-

ingly, lay across his breast and hands; her grateful eyes were close to his, her breath was upon his cheek; and yet his only consciousness was of the possibly ludicrous figure he might present to his brother should he meet him with Mornie Nixon in his arms. Not a word was spoken by either till they reached the summit. Relieved at finding his brother still absent, he turned not unkindly toward the helpless figure on his arm. "I don't see what makes Ruth so late," he said. "He's always here by sundown. Perhaps" —

"Perhaps he knows I'm here," said Mornie, with a bitter laugh.

"I did n't say that," said Rand, "and I don't think it. What I meant was, he might have met a party that was picnicking here to-day. Sol Saunders and wife, and Miss Euphemia" —

Mornie flung his arm away from her with a passionate gesture. "*They* here! picnicking *here!* — those people *here?*"

"Yes," said Rand, unconsciously a little ashamed. "They came here accidently."

Mornie's quick passion had subsided; she had sunk again wearily and helplessly on a rock beside him. "I suppose," she said, with a weak laugh — "I suppose they talked of *me.* I suppose they told you how — with their lies and fair promises — they tricked me out, and set me before an audience of brutes and laughing hyenas to make merry over! Did they tell you of the insults that I received? — how the sins of my parents were flung at me instead of bouquets? Did they tell you they could have spared me this, but they wanted the few extra dollars taken in at the door? No!"

"They said nothing of the kind," replied Rand surlily.

"Then you must have stopped them! You were horrified enough to know that I had dared to take the only honest

way left me to make a living. I know you, Randolph Pinkney. You'd rather see Joaquin Muriatta, the Mexican bandit, standing before you to-night with a revolver, than the helpless, shamed, miserable Mornie Nixon! And you can't help yourself, unless you throw me over the cliff. Perhaps you'd better," she said, with a bitter laugh that faded from her lips as she leaned, pale and breathless, against the boulder.

"Ruth will tell you" — began Rand.

"D—n Ruth!"

Rand turned away.

"Stop!" she said suddenly, staggering to her feet. "I'm sick — for all I know, dying. God grant that it may be so! But, if you are a man, you will help me to your cabin — to some place where I can lie down *now* and be at rest. I'm very, very tired."

She paused; she would have fallen again, but Rand, seeing more in her face than her voice interpreted to his sullen ears, took her sullenly in his arms and carried her to the cabin. Her eyes glanced around the bright parti-colored walls, and a faint smile came to her lips as she put aside her bonnet, adorned with a companion pinion of the bright wings that covered it.

"Which is Ruth's bed?" she asked.

Rand pointed to it.

"Lay me there!"

Rand would have hesitated, but with another look at her face complied.

She lay quite still a moment. Presently she said, "Give me some brandy or whiskey!"

Rand was silent and confused.

"I forgot," she added, half bitterly; "I know you have not that commonest and cheapest of vices."

She lay quite still again. Suddenly she raised herself partly on her elbow, and in a strong, firm voice, said — "Rand!"

"Yes, Mornie."

"If you are wise and practical, as you assume to be, you will do what I ask you without a question. If you do it *at once* you may save yourself and Ruth some trouble, some mortification, and perhaps some remorse and sorrow. Do you hear me?"

"Yes!"

"Go to the nearest doctor and bring him here with you."

"But *you!*"

Her voice was strong, confident, steady and patient. "You can safely leave me until then."

In another moment, Rand was plunging down the "slide." But it was past midnight when he struggled over the last boulder up the ascent, dragging the half-exhausted medical wisdom of Brown's Ferry on his arm.

"I've been gone long, doctor," said Rand feverishly, "and she looked *so* death-like when I left. If we should be too late?"

The doctor stopped suddenly, lifted his head, and pricked his ears like a hound on a peculiar scent. "We *are* too late," he said, with a slight professional laugh.

Indignant and horrified, Rand turned upon him.

"Listen," said the doctor, lifting his hand.

Rand listened; so intently that he heard the familiar moan of the river below, but the great stony field lay silent before him. And then, borne across its bare barren bosom, like its own articulation, came faintly the feeble wail of a new-born babe.

PART III

STORM

THE doctor hurried ahead in the darkness. Rand, who had stopped paralyzed at the ominous sound, started forward again mechanically; but as the cry arose again more distinctly, and the full significance of the doctor's words came to him, he faltered, stopped, and with cheeks burning with shame and helpless indignation, sank upon a stone beside the shaft, and, burying his face in his hands, fairly gave way to a burst of boyish tears. Yet even then, the recollection that he had not cried since, years ago, his mother's dying hands had joined his and Ruth's childish fingers together, stung him fiercely and dried his tears in angry heat upon his cheeks.

How long he sat there, he remembered not; what he thought, he recalled not. But the wildest and most extravagant plans and resolves availed him nothing in the face of this forever desecrated home, and this shameful culmination of his ambitious life on the mountain. Once he thought of flight, but the reflection that he would still abandon his brother to shame, perhaps a self-contented shame, checked him hopelessly. Could he avert the future? He *must* — but how? Yet he could only sit and stare into the darkness in dumb abstraction.

Sitting there, his eyes fell upon a peculiar object in a crevice of the ledge beside the shaft. It was the tin pail containing his dinner, which, according to their custom, it was the duty of the brother who stayed above ground to prepare and place for the brother who worked below.

Ruth must, consequently, have put it there before he left that morning, and Rand had overlooked it while sharing the repast of the strangers at noon. At the sight of this dumb witness of their mutual cares and labors, Rand sighed — half in brotherly sorrow, half in a selfish sense of injury done him. He took up the pail mechanically, removed its cover and — started! For on top of the carefully bestowed provisions lay a little note, addressed to him in Ruth's peculiar scrawl.

He opened it with feverish hands, held it in the light of the peaceful moon, and read as follows: —

DEAR, DEAR BROTHER, — When you read this I shall be far away. I go because I shall not stay to disgrace you, and because the girl that I brought trouble upon has gone away too, to hide her disgrace and mine; and where she goes, Rand, I ought to follow her, and, please God, I will! I am not as wise or as good as you are, but it seems the best I can do; and God bless you, dear old Randy, boy! Times and times again I've wanted to tell you all, and reckoned to do so; but whether you was sitting before me in the cabin, or working beside me in the drift, I could n't get to look upon your honest face, dear brother, and say what things I 'd been keeping from you so long. I'll stay away until I've done what I ought to do, and if you can say, "Come, Ruth," I will come; but until you can say it, the mountain is yours, Randy boy, the mine is yours, the cabin is yours, *all* is yours! Rub out the old chalk marks, Rand, as I rub them out here in my [a few words here were blurred and indistinct, as if the moon had suddenly become dim-eyed too]. God bless you, brother.

P. S. — You know I mean Mornie all the time. It 's she I 'm going to seek; but don't you think so bad of her as you do; I am so much worse then she. I wanted to tell you that all along, but I did n't dare. She 's run

away from the Ferry, half crazy; said she was going to Sacramento, and I am going there to find her alive or dead. Forgive me, brother! Don't throw this down, right away; hold it in your hand a moment, Randy, boy, and try hard to think it's my hand in yours. And so good-by, and God bless you, old Randy.

From your loving brother, RUTH.

A deep sense of relief overpowered every other feeling in Rand's breast. It was clear that Ruth had not yet discovered the truth of Mornie's flight; he was on his way to Sacramento, and before he could return, Mornie could be removed. Once despatched in some other direction, with Ruth once more returned and under his brother's guidance, the separation could be made easy and final. There was evidently no marriage as yet, and now, the fear of an immediate meeting over, there should be none. For Rand had already feared this; had recalled the few infelicitous relations, legal and illegal, which were common to the adjoining camp; the flagrantly miserable life of the husband of a San Francisco anonyma, who lived in style at the Ferry; the shameful carousals and more shameful quarrels of the Frenchman and Mexican woman, who "kept house" at "the Crossing;" the awful spectacle of the three half-breed Indian children who played before the cabin of a fellow miner and townsman. Thank heaven, the Eagle's Nest on Table Mountain should never be pointed at from the valley as another.

A heavy hand upon his arm brought him trembling to his feet. He turned and met the half-anxious, half-contemptuous glance of the doctor.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," he said drily, "but it's about time you or somebody else put in an appearance at that cabin. Luckily for *her*, she's one woman in a thousand — has had her wits about her better than some folks

I know, and has left me little to do but make her comfortable. But she 's gone through too much — fought her little fight too gallantly — is altogether too much of a trump to be played off upon now. So rise up out of that, young man; pick up your scattered faculties, and fetch a woman — some sensible creature of her own sex — to look after her; for, without wishing to be personal, I 'm d—d if I trust her to the likes of you."

There was no mistaking Doctor Duchesne's voice and manner, and Rand was affected by it, as most people were, throughout the valley of the Stanislaus. But he turned upon him his frank and boyish face, and said simply, "But I don't know any woman, or where to get one."

The doctor looked at him again. "Well, I 'll find you some one," he said, softening.

"Thank you," said Rand.

The doctor was disappearing. With an effort Rand recalled him. "One moment, doctor." He hesitated, and his cheeks were glowing. "You 'll please say nothing about this down there" — he pointed to the valley — "for a time. And you 'll say to the woman you send" —

Dr. Duchesne, whose resolute lips were sealed upon the secrets of half Tuolumne county, interrupted him scornfully. "I cannot answer for the woman — you must talk to her yourself. As for me, generally I keep my professional visits to myself, but" — he laid his hand on Rand's arm — "if I find out you 're putting on any airs to that poor creature, — if on my next visit her lips or her pulse tell me you have n't been acting on the square to her, I 'll drop a hint to drunken old Nixon where his daughter is hidden. I reckon she could stand his brutality better than yours. Good-night!"

In another moment he was gone. Rand, who had held back his quick tongue, feeling himself in the power of this man, once more alone, sank on a rock, and buried his face

in his hands. Recalling himself in a moment, he rose, wiped his hot eyelids, and staggered toward the cabin. It was quite still now; he paused on the topmost step and listened; there was no sound from the ledge or the Eagle's Nest that clung to it. Half timidly he descended the winding steps, and paused before the door of the cabin. "Mornie," he said, in a dry, metallic voice, whose only indication of the presence of sickness was in the lowness of its pitch — "Mornie." There was no reply. "Mornie," he repeated impatiently, "it's me — Rand! If you want anything you're to call me. I am just outside." Still no answer came from the silent cabin. He pushed open the door gently, hesitated, and stepped over the threshold.

A change in the interior of the cabin within the last few hours, showed a new presence. The guns, shovels, picks, and blankets had disappeared, the two chairs were drawn against the wall, the table placed by the bedside. The swinging lantern was shaded towards the bed — the object of Rand's attention. On that bed, his brother's bed, lay a helpless woman, pale from the long black hair that matted her damp forehead, and clung to her hollow cheeks. Her face was turned to the wall, so that the softened light fell upon her profile, which to Rand, at that moment, seemed even noble and strong. But the next moment, his eye fell upon the shoulder and arm that lay nearest to him, and the little bundle swathed in flannel that it clasped to her breast. His brow grew dark as he gazed. The sleeping woman moved: perhaps it was an instinctive consciousness of his presence — perhaps it was only the current of cold air from the opened door, — but she shuddered slightly, and, still unconscious, drew the child as if away from *him*, and nearer to her breast. The shamed blood rushed to Rand's face, and saying half aloud, "I 'm not going to take your precious babe away from you," turned in half-boyish pettishness

away. Nevertheless, he came back again, shortly, to the bedside, and gazed upon them both. She certainly did look altogether more ladylike and less aggressive, lying there so still; sickness, that cheap refining power of some natures, was not unbecoming to her. But this bundle! A boyish curiosity, stronger than even his strong objection to the whole episode, was steadily impelling him to lift the blanket from it. "I suppose she 'd waken if I did," said Rand, "but I 'd like to know what right the doctor had to wrap it up in my best flannel shirt." This fresh grievance, the fruit of his curiosity, sent him away again to meditate on the ledge. After a few moments he returned again, opened the cupboard at the foot of the bed softly, took thence a piece of chalk, and scrawled in large letters upon the door of the cupboard, "If you want anything, sing out: I 'm just outside — RAND." This done, he took a blanket and bear-skin from the corner, and walked to the door. But here he paused, looked back at the inscription, evidently not satisfied with it, returned, took up the chalk, added a line, rubbed it out again, and repeated this operation a few times until he produced the polite postscript — "Hope you 'll be better soon." Then he retreated to the ledge, spread the bear-skin beside the door, and rolling himself in a blanket, lit his pipe for his night-long vigil. But Rand, although a martyr, a philosopher, and a moralist, was young. In less then ten minutes the pipe dropped from his lips, and he was asleep.

He awoke with a strange sense of heat and suffocation, and with difficulty shook off his covering. Rubbing his eyes, he discovered that an extra blanket had in some mysterious way been added in the night, and beneath his head was a pillow he had no recollection of placing there when he went to sleep. By degrees the events of the past night forced themselves upon his benumbed faculties, and he sat up. The sun was riding high, the door of the cabin

was open. Stretching himself, he staggered to his feet, and looked in through the yawning crack at the hinges. He rubbed his eyes again. Was he still asleep, and followed by a dream of yesterday? For there, even in the very attitude he remembered to have seen her sitting at her luncheon on the previous day, with her knitting on her lap, sat Mrs. Sol Saunders! What did it mean? or had she really been sitting there ever since, and all the events that followed only a dream?

A hand was laid upon his arm, and turning he saw the murky black eyes and Indian-inked beard of Sol beside him. That gentleman put his finger on his lips with a theatrical gesture, and then slowly retreating in the well-known manner of the buried Majesty of Denmark waved him, like another Hamlet, to a remoter part of the ledge. This reached, he grasped Rand warmly by the hand, shook it heartily, and said, "It's all right, my boy; all right!"

"But" — began Rand. The hot blood flowed to his cheeks, he stammered and stopped short.

"It's all right, I say! Don't you mind! We'll pull you through."

"But, Mrs. Sol! what does she" —

"Rosey has taken the matter in hand, sir; and when that woman takes a matter in hand, whether it's a baby or a rehearsal, sir, she makes it buzz."

"But how did she know?" stammered Rand.

"How? Well, sir, the scene opened something like this," said Sol professionally. "Curtain rises on me and Mrs. Sol. Domestic interior — practicable chairs, table, books, newspapers. Enter Doctor Duchesne — eccentric character part, very popular with the boys; tells off-hand affecting story of strange woman — 'one more unfortunate,' having baby in Eagle's Nest — lonely place on 'peaks of Snowdon,' midnight; eagles screaming, you know, and far down unfathomable depths; only attendant, cold-blooded

ruffian, evidently father of child, with sinister designs on child and mother."

"He did n't say *that!*" said Rand, with an agonized smile.

"Order! Sit down in front!" continued Sol, easily. "Mrs. Sol highly interested — a mother herself — demands name of place? 'Table Mountain!' No, it cannot be — it is! Excitement. Mystery! Rosey rises to occasion — comes to the front: 'Some one must go; I — I — will go myself!' Myself, coming to the centre: 'Not alone, dearest; I — I will accompany you!' A shriek at right upper entrance. Enter the Marysville Pet. 'I have heard all. 'T is a base calumny. It cannot be *he!* Randolph! Never!' 'Dare you accompany us?' 'I will!' Tableau!"

"Is Miss Euphemia — here?" gasped Rand, practical, even in his embarrassment.

"Or-r-rder! Scene second. Summit of mountain — moonlight. Peaks of Snowdon in distance. Right — lonely cabin. Enter slowly up defile, Sol, Mrs. Sol, the Pet. Advance slowly to cabin. Suppressed shriek from the Pet, who rushes to recumbent figure — Left — discovered lying beside cabin door. ''T is he! Hist! — he sleeps!' Throws blanket over him and retires up stage — so." Here Sol achieved a vile imitation of the Pet's most enchanting stage manner. "Mrs. Sol advances — Centre — throws open door! Shriek! ''T is Mornie — the lost found!' The Pet advances — 'And the father is — ?' 'Not Rand!' The Pet kneeling, 'Just Heaven, I thank thee!' 'No, it is'" —

"Hush!" said Rand appealingly, looking toward the cabin.

"Hush it is!" said the actor good-naturedly; "but it's all right, Mr. Rand — we 'll pull you through."

Later in the morning, Rand learned that Mornie's ill-

fated connection with the "Star Variety Troupe" had been a source of anxiety to Mrs. Sol, and she had reproached herself for the girl's infelicitous début.

"But Lord bless you, Mr. Rand," said Sol, "it was all in the way of business. She came to us — was fresh and new — her chance, looking at it professionally, was as good as any amateur's; but, what with her relations here, and her bein' known, she did n't take! We lost money on her! It 's natural she should feel a little ugly. We all do when we get sorter kicked back on to ourselves, and find we can't stand alone. Why, you would n't believe it," he continued, with a moist twinkle of his black eyes, "but the night I lost my little Rosey of diphtheria in Gold Hill, the child was down on the bills for a comic song, and I had to drag Mrs. Sol on, cut up as she was, and filled up with that much of old Bourbon to keep her nerves stiff, so she could do an old gag with me to gain time and make up the 'variety.' Why, sir, when I came to the front *I* was ugly! And when one of the boys in the front row sang out, 'Don't expose that poor child to the night air, Sol' — meaning Mrs. Sol, I acted ugly. No, sir, it 's human nature; and it was quite natural that Mornie, when she caught sight o' Mrs. Sol's face last night, should rise up and cuss us both. Lord, if she 'd only acted like that! But the old lady got her quiet at last, and, as I said before, it 's all right, and we 'll pull her through! But don't *you* thank us; it 's a little matter betwixt us and Mornie. We 've got everything fixed, so that Mrs. Sol can stay right along. We 'll pull Mornie through, and get her away from this and her baby too, as soon as we can. You won't get mad if I tell you something?" said Sol, with a half-apologetic laugh. "Mrs. Sol was rather down on you the other day — hated you on sight, and preferred your brother to you; but when she found he 'd run off and left *you* — you don't mind my sayin' it — a 'mere boy,' to take what

oughter be *his* place, why she just wheeled round agin' him. I suppose he got flustered and could n't face the music. Never left a word of explanation? Well, it was n't exactly square — though I tell the old woman it 's human nature. He might have dropped a hint where he was goin'. Well, there, I won't say a word more agin' him. I know how you feel! Hush it is!"

It was the firm conviction of the simple-minded Sol that no one knew the various natural indications of human passion better than himself; perhaps it was one of the fallacies of his profession that the expression of all human passion was limited to certain conventional signs and sounds. Consequently, when Rand colored violently, became confused, stammered, and at last turned hastily away, the good-hearted fellow instantly recognized the unfailing evidence of modesty and innocence embarrassed by recognition. As for Rand, I fear his shame was only momentary; confirmed in the belief of his ulterior wisdom and virtue, his first embarrassment over, he was not displeased with this half-way tribute, and really believed that the time would come when Mr. Sol should eventually praise his sagacity and reservation, and acknowledge that he was something more than a mere boy. He nevertheless shrank from meeting Mornie that morning, and was glad that the presence of Mrs. Sol relieved him from that duty.

The day passed uneventfully. Rand busied himself in his usual avocations, and constructed a temporary shelter for himself and Sol beside the shaft, besides rudely shaping a few necessary articles of furniture for Mrs. Sol.

"It will be a little spell yet afore Mornie 's able to be moved," suggested Sol, "and you might as well be comfortable."

Rand sighed at this prospect, yet presently forgot himself in the good humor of his companion, whose admiration for himself he began to patronizingly admit. There was

no sense of degradation in accepting the friendship of this man who had traveled so far, seen so much, and yet, as a practical man of the world, Rand felt, was so inferior to himself. The absence of Miss Euphemia, who had early left the mountain, was a source of odd, half-definite relief. Indeed, when he closed his eyes to rest that night, it was with a sense that the reality of his situation was not as bad as he had feared. Once only, the figure of his brother, haggard, weary and footsore, on his hopeless quest, wandering in lonely trails and lonelier settlements, came across his fancy; but with it came the greater fear of his return, and the pathetic figure was banished. "And besides, he 's in Sacramento by this time, and like as not forgotten us all," he muttered; and twining this poppy and mandragora around his pillow, he fell asleep.

His spirits had quite returned the next morning, and once or twice he found himself singing while at work in the shaft. The fear that Ruth might return to the mountain before he could get rid of Mornie, and the slight anxiety that had grown upon him to know something of his brother's movements, and to be able to govern them as he wished, caused him to hit upon the plan of constructing an ingenious advertisement to be published in the San Francisco journals, wherein the missing Ruth should be advised that news of his quest should be communicated to him by "a friend," through the same medium, after an interval of two weeks. Full of this amiable intention, he returned to the surface to dinner. Here, to his momentary confusion, he met Miss Euphemia, who, in absence of Sol, was assisting Mrs. Sol in the details of the household.

If the honest frankness with which that young lady greeted him was not enough to relieve his embarrassment, he would have forgotten it in the utterly new and changed aspect she presented. Her extravagant walking costume of the previous day was replaced by some bright calico, a

little white apron, and a broad-brimmed straw hat, which seemed to Rand, in some odd fashion, to restore her original girlish simplicity. The change was certainly not unbecoming to her: if her waist was not as tightly pinched, a la mode, there still was an honest, youthful plumpness about it; her step was freer for the absence of her high-heel boots; and even the hand she extended to Rand, if not quite so small as in her tight gloves, and a little brown from exposure, was magnetic in its strong, kindly grasp. There was perhaps a slight suggestion of the practical Mr. Sol in her wholesome presence, and Rand could not help wondering if Mrs. Sol had ever been a Gold Hill "pet" before her marriage with Mr. Sol. The young girl noticed his curious glance.

"You never saw me in my rehearsal dress before," she said, with a laugh; "but I'm not 'company' to-day, and did n't put on my best harness to knock round in. I suppose I look dreadful."

"I don't think you look bad," said Rand simply.

"Thank you," said Euphemia, with a laugh and a curtsey. "But this is n't getting the dinner."

As part of that operation evidently was the taking off of her hat, the putting up of some thick blonde locks that had escaped, and the rolling up of her sleeves over a pair of strong rounded arms, Rand lingered near her. All trace of the Pet's previous professional coquetry was gone — perhaps it was only replaced by a more natural one — but as she looked up and caught sight of Rand's interested face, she laughed again and colored a little. Slight as was the blush, it was sufficient to kindle a sympathetic fire in Rand's own cheeks, which was so utterly unexpected to him that he turned on his heel in confusion. "I reckon she thinks I'm soft and silly, like Ruth," he soliloquized, and determining not to look at her again, betook himself to a distant and contemplative pipe. In vain did Miss Euphemia address

herself to the ostentatious getting of the dinner in full view of him; in vain did she bring the coffee-pot away from the fire, and nearer Rand, with the apparent intention of examining its contents in a better light; in vain, while wiping a plate, did she, absorbed in the distant prospect, walk to the verge of the mountain, and become statuesque and forgetful. The sulky young gentleman took no outward notice of her.

Mrs. Sol's attendance upon Mornie prevented her leaving the cabin, and Rand and Miss Euphemia dined in the open air alone. The ridiculousness of keeping up a formal attitude to his solitary companion caused Rand to relax; but, to his astonishment, the Pet seemed to have become correspondingly distant and formal. After a few moments of discomfort, Rand, who had eaten little, arose, and "believed he would go back to work."

"Ah yes," said the Pet, with an indifferent air, "I suppose you must. Well, good-by, Mr. Pinkney."

Rand turned. "*You* are not going?" he asked, in some uneasiness.

"*I've* got some work to do, too," returned Miss Euphemia, a little curtly.

"But," said the practical Rand, "I thought you allowed that you were fixed to stay until to-morrow?"

But here Miss Euphemia, with rising color and slight acerbity of voice, was not aware that she was "fixed to stay" anywhere, least of all when she was in the way. More than that, she *must* say, although perhaps it made no difference, and she ought not to say it — that she was not in the habit of intruding upon gentlemen, who plainly gave her to understand that her company was not desirable. She did not know why she said this — of course it could make no difference to anybody who did n't, of course, care; but she only wanted to say that she only came here because her dear friend, her adopted mother — and a better woman never breathed — had come and had asked her to stay. Of course,

Mrs. Sol was an intruder herself — Mr. Sol was an intruder — they were all intruders; she only wondered that Mr. Pinkney had borne with them so long. She knew it was an awful thing to be here, taking care of a poor — poor, helpless woman; but perhaps Mr. Rand's *brother* might forgive them if he could n't. But no matter, she would go — Mr. Sol would go — *all* would go, and then, perhaps, Mr. Rand —

She stopped breathless; she stopped with the corner of her apron against her tearful hazel eyes; she stopped with what was more remarkable than all — Rand's arm actually around her waist, and his astonished, alarmed face within a few inches of her own.

"Why, Miss Euphemia, Phemie, my dear girl! I never meant anything like *that*," said Rand earnestly. "I really did n't now! Come now!"

"You never once spoke to me when I sat down," said Miss Euphemia, feebly endeavoring to withdraw from Rand's grasp.

"I really did n't! Oh, come now, look here! I did n't! Don't! There 's a dear — *there!*"

This last conclusive exposition was a kiss. Miss Euphemia was not quick enough to release herself from his arms. He anticipated that act a full half-second, and had dropped his own, pale and breathless.

The girl recovered herself first. "There, I declare, I 'm forgetting Mrs. Sol's coffee!" she exclaimed, hastily, and snatching up the coffee-pot, disappeared. When she returned, Rand was gone. Miss Euphemia busied herself, demurely, in clearing up the dishes, with the tail of her eye sweeping the horizon of the summit level around her. But no Rand appeared. Presently she began to laugh quietly to herself. This occurred several times during her occupation, which was somewhat prolonged. The result of this meditative hilarity was summed up in a somewhat grave

and thoughtful deduction, as she walked slowly back to the cabin, "I do believe I 'm the first woman that that boy ever kissed."

Miss Euphemia stayed that day and the next, and Rand forgot his embarrassment. By what means, I know not, Miss Euphemia managed to restore Rand's confidence in himself and in her, and in a little ramble on the mountain side, got him to relate, albeit somewhat reluctantly, the particulars of his rescue of Mornie from her dangerous position on the broken trail.

"And if you had n't got there as soon as you did, she 'd have fallen?" asked the Pet.

"I reckon," returned Rand gloomily, "she was sorter dazed and crazed like."

"And you saved her life?"

"I suppose so, if you put it that way," said Rand sulkily.

"But how did you get her up the mountain again?"

"Oh, I got her up," returned Rand moodily.

"But how? Really, Mr. Rand, you don't know how interesting this is. It 's as good as a play," said the Pet, with a little excited laugh.

"Oh, I carried her up!"

"In your arms?"

"Y-e-e-s."

Miss Euphemia paused, and bit off the stalk of a flower, made a wry face, and threw it away from her in disgust.

Then she dug a few tiny holes in the earth with her parasol, and buried bits of the flower-stalk in them, as if they had been tender memories. "I suppose you knew Mornie very well?" she asked.

"I used to run across her in the woods," responded Rand shortly, "a year ago. I did n't know her so well then as" — He stopped.

"As what? as *now?*" asked the Pet abruptly.

Rand, who was coloring over his narrow escape from a topic which a delicate kindness of Sol had excluded from their intercourse on the mountain, stammered "As *you* do — I meant."

The Pet tossed her head a little, "Oh, I don't know her at all — except through Sol!"

Rand stared hard at this. The Pet, who was looking at him intently, said, "Show me the place where you saw Mornie clinging that night."

"It's dangerous," suggested Rand.

"You mean I'd be afraid! Try me! I don't believe she was *so* dreadfully frightened!"

"Why?" asked Rand, in astonishment.

"Oh, — because" —

Rand sat down in vague wonderment.

"Show it to me," continued the Pet, "or — I'll find it *alone!*"

Thus challenged, he arose, and after a few moments' climbing stood with her upon the trail. "You see that thorn-bush where the rock has fallen away. It was just there! It is not safe to go farther. No, really! Miss Euphemia! Please don't! It's almost certain death!"

But the giddy girl had darted past him, and, face to the wall of the cliff, was creeping along the dangerous path. Rand followed mechanically. Once or twice the trail crumbled beneath her feet, but she clung to a projecting root of chapparal, and laughed. She had almost reached her elected goal when, slipping, the treacherous chapparal she clung to yielded in her grasp, and Rand, with a cry, sprung forward. But the next instant she quickly transferred her hold to a cleft in the cliff and was safe. Not so her companion. The soil beneath him, loosened by the impulse of his spring, slipped away; he was falling with it, when she caught him sharply with her disengaged hand, and together they scrambled to a more secure footing.

"I could have reached it alone," said the Pet, "if you 'd left me alone."

"Thank Heaven, we 're saved," said Rand gravely.

"*And without a rope,*" said Miss Euphemia significantly.

Rand did not understand her. But as they slowly returned to the summit he stammered out the always difficult thanks of a man who has been physically helped by one of the weaker sex. Miss Euphemia was quick to see her error.

"I might have made you lose your footing by catching at you," she said meekly. "But I was so frightened for you, and could not help it."

The superior animal, thoroughly bamboozled, thereupon complimented her on her dexterity.

"Oh, that 's nothing," she said, with a sigh. "I used to do the flying-trapeze business with papa when I was a child, and I 've not forgotten it." With this and other confidences of her early life, in which Rand betrayed considerable interest, they beguiled the tedious ascent. "I ought to have made you carry me up," said the lady, with a little laugh, when they reached the summit; "but you have n't known me as long as you have Mornie — have you?" With this mysterious speech she bade Rand "Good-night," and hurried off to the cabin.

And so a week passed by — the week so dreaded by Rand, yet passed so pleasantly, that at times it seemed as if that dread were only a trick of his fancy, or as if the circumstances that surrounded him were different from what he believed them to be. On the seventh day the doctor had stayed longer than usual, and Rand, who had been sitting with Euphemia on the ledge by the shaft, watching the sunset, had barely time to withdraw his hand from hers as Mrs. Sol, a trifle pale and wearied-looking, approached him.

"I don't like to trouble you," she said — indeed they had seldom troubled him with the details of Mornie's convalescence, or even her needs and requirements, — "but the doctor is alarmed about Mornie, and she has asked to see you. I think you 'd better go in and speak to her. You know," continued Mrs. Sol delicately, "you have n't been in there since the night she was taken sick, and maybe a new face might do her good."

The guilty blood flew to Rand's face as he stammered, "I thought I 'd be in the way. I did n't believe she cared much to see me. Is she worse?"

"The doctor is looking very anxious," said Mrs. Sol simply.

The blood returned from Rand's face, and settled around his heart. He turned very pale. He had consoled himself always for his complicity in Ruth's absence, that he was taking good care of Mornie, or, what is considered by most selfish natures an equivalent — permitting or encouraging some one else to "take good care of her," but here was a contingency utterly unforeseen. It did not occur to him that this "taking good care" of her could result in anything but a perfect solution of her troubles, or that there could be any future to her condition but one of recovery. But what if she should die? A sudden and helpless sense of his responsibility to Ruth — to — *her* — brought him trembling to his feet.

He hurried to the cabin, where Mrs. Sol left him with a word of caution. "You 'll find her changed and quiet — very quiet. If I was you I would n't say anything to bring back her old self."

The change which Rand saw was so great, the face that was turned to him so quiet, that, with a new fear upon him, he would have preferred the savage eyes and reckless mien of the old Mornie whom he hated. With his habitual impulsiveness he tried to say something that should express

that fact not unkindly, — but faltered, and awkwardly sank into the chair by her bedside.

"I don't wonder you stare at me now," she said, in a far-off voice; "it seems to you strange to see me lying here so quiet. You are thinking how wild I was when I came here that night. I must have been crazy, I think. I dreamed that I said dreadful things to you; but you must forgive me, and not mind it. I was crazy then." She stopped and folded the blanket between her thin fingers. "I did n't ask you to come here to tell you that, or to remind you of it, but — but when I was crazy, I said so many worse, dreadful things of *him;* and you — *you* will be left behind to tell him of it."

Rand was vaguely murmuring something to the effect that "he knew she did n't mean anything," that "she must n't think of it again," that "he 'd forgotten all about it," when she stopped him with a tired gesture.

"Perhaps I was wrong to think that, after I am gone, you would care to tell him anything. Perhaps I 'm wrong to think of it at all, or to care what he will think of me — except for the sake of the child — *his* child, Rand! — that I must leave behind me. He will know that *it* never abused him. No, God bless its sweet heart! *it* never was wild and wicked and hateful, like its cruel, crazy mother. And he will love it; and you, perhaps, will love it too — just a little, Rand! Look at it!" She tried to raise the helpless bundle beside her in her arms, but failed. "You must lean over," she said, faintly, to Rand. "It looks like him, does n't it?"

Rand, with wondering, embarrassed eyes, tried to see some resemblance in the little blue red oval, to the sad, wistful face of his brother, which even then was haunting him from some mysterious distance. He kissed the child's forehead, but even then so vaguely and perfunctorily, that the mother sighed, and drew it closer to her breast.

"The doctor says," she continued, in a calmer voice, "that I 'm not doing as well as I ought to. I don't think," she faltered, with something of her old bitter laugh, "that I 'm ever doing as well as I ought to, and perhaps it 's not strange now that I don't. And he says, that in case anything happens to me, I ought to look ahead! I have looked ahead! It 's a dark look ahead, Rand — a horror of blackness, without kind faces, without the baby, without — without *him!*"

She turned her face away, and laid it on the bundle by her side. It was so quiet in the cabin, that through the open door, beyond, the faint rhythmical moan of the pines below was distinctly heard.

"I know it 's foolish — but that is what 'looking ahead' always meant to me," she said, with a sigh. "But, since the doctor has been gone, I 've talked to Mrs. Sol, and find it 's for the best. And I look ahead, and see more clearly. I look ahead, and see my disgrace removed far away from *him* and you. I look ahead, and see you and *he* living together, happily, as you did before I came between you. I look ahead, and see my past life forgotten, my faults forgiven, and I think I see you both loving my baby, and perhaps loving me a little for its sake. Thank you, Rand, thank you!"

For Rand's hand had caught hers beside the pillow, and he was standing over her, whiter than she. Something in the pressure of his hand emboldened her to go on, and even lent a certain strength to her voice.

"When it comes to *that*, Rand, you 'll not let these people take the baby away. You 'll keep it *here* with you until *he* comes. And something tells me that he will come when I am gone. You 'll keep it here in the pure air and sunlight of the mountain, and out of those wicked depths below; and when I am gone, and they are gone, and only you and Ruth and baby are here, maybe you 'll think that

it came to you in a cloud on the mountain — a cloud that lingered only long enough to drop its burden, and faded, leaving the sunlight and dew behind. What is it — Rand? What are you looking at?"

"I was thinking," said Rand, in a strange altered voice, "that I must trouble you to let me take down those duds and furbelows that hang on the wall, so that I can get at some traps of mine behind them." He took some articles from the wall, replaced the dresses of Mrs. Sol, and answered Mornie's look of inquiry. "I was only getting at my purse and my revolver," he said, showing them. "I've got to get some stores at the Ferry, by daylight."

Mornie sighed. "I'm giving you great trouble, Rand, I know; but it won't be for long."

He muttered something, took her hand again, and bade her "good-night." When he reached the door he looked back. The light was shining full upon her face as she lay there with her babe on her breast, bravely "looking ahead."

PART IV

THE CLOUDS PASS

It was early morning at the Ferry. The "up coach" had passed with lights unextinguished, and the "outsides" still asleep. The ferryman had gone up to the Ferry Mansion House, swinging his lantern, and had found the sleepy-looking "all-night" bar-keeper on the point of withdrawing for the day on a mattress under the bar. An Indian half-breed, porter of the Mansion House, was washing out the stains of recent nocturnal dissipation from the bar-room and veranda, a few birds were twittering on the cotton-woods beside the river, a bolder few had alighted upon the veranda and were trying to reconcile the existence of so much lemon-peel and cigar stumps with their ideas of a beneficent Creator. A faint earthy freshness and perfume rose along the river banks. Deep shadows still lay upon the opposite shore, but in the distance, four miles away, morning along the level crest of Table Mountain walked with rosy tread.

The sleeping bar-keeper was that morning doomed to disappointment. For scarcely had the coach passed, when steps were heard upon the veranda, and a weary dusty traveler threw his blanket and knapsack to the porter, and then dropped into a vacant arm-chair, with his eyes fixed on the distant crest of Table Mountain. He remained motionless for some time, until the bar-keeper, who had already concocted the conventional welcome of the Mansion House, appeared with it in a glass, put it upon the table, glanced at the stranger, and then, thoroughly awake, cried out —

"Ruth Pinkney — or I 'm a Chinaman!"

The stranger lifted his eyes wearily. Hollow circles were around their orbits, haggard lines were in his cheeks. But it was Ruth.

He took the glass and drained it at a single draught. "Yes," he said absently, "Ruth Pinkney," and fixed his eyes again on the distant rosy crest.

"On your way up home?" suggested the bar-keeper, following the direction of Ruth's eyes.

"Perhaps."

"Been upon a pasear — hain't yer? Been havin' a little tear round Sacramento — seein' the sights."

Ruth smiled bitterly. "Yes."

The bar-keeper lingered — ostentatiously wiping a glass. But Ruth again became abstracted in the mountain, and the bar-keeper turned away.

How pure and clear that summit looked to him! how restful and steadfast with serenity and calm! how unlike his own feverish, dusty, travel-worn self! A week had elasped since he had last looked upon it — a week of disappointment, of anxious fears, of doubts, of wild imaginings, of utter helplessness. In his hopeless quest of the missing Mornie, he had, in fancy, seen this serene eminence haunting his remorseful passion-stricken soul. And now, without a clue to guide him to her unknown hiding-place, he was back again to face the brother whom he had deceived, with only the confession of his own weakness. Hard as it was to lose forever the fierce reproachful glances of the woman he loved, it was still harder to a man of Ruth's temperament to look again upon the face of the brother he feared. A hand laid upon his shoulder startled him. It was the bar-keeper.

"If it 's a fair question, Ruth Pinkney, I 'd like to ask ye how long ye kalkilate to hang around the Ferry to-day?"

"Why?" demanded Ruth haughtily.

"Because, whatever you 've been and done, I want ye to have a square show. Ole Nixon has been cavortin' round yer the last two days, swearin' to kill you on sight for runnin' off with his darter. Sabe? Now let me ax ye two questions. First — are you heeled?"

Ruth responded to this dialectical inquiry affirmatively, by putting his hand on his revolver.

"Good! Now, second — have you got the gal along here with you?"

"No," responded Ruth, in a hollow voice.

"That 's better yet," said the man, without heeding the tone of the reply. "A woman — and especially *the* woman, in a row of this kind — handicaps a man awful." He paused and took up the empty glass. "Look yer, Ruth Pinkney, I 'm a square man, and I 'll be square with you. So I 'll just tell you you 've got the demdest odds agin' ye. Pr'aps ye know it, and don't keer. Well, the boys around yer are all sidin' with the old man Nixon. It 's the first time the old rip ever had a hand in his favor; so the boys will see fair play for Nixon and agin' *you*. But I reckon you don't mind him?"

"So little, I shall never pull trigger on him!" said Ruth gravely.

The bar-keeper stared, and rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Well, thar 's that Kanaka Joe, who used to be sorter sweet on Mornie — he 's an ugly devil — he 's helpin' the old man!"

The sad look faded from Ruth's eyes suddenly. A certain wild Berserker rage — a taint of the blood, inherited from heaven knows what Old-World ancestry, which had made the twin brothers' Southwestern eccentricities respected in the settlement — glowed in its place. The bar-keeper noted it, and augured a lively future for the day's festivities. But it faded again; and Ruth, as he rose, turned hesitatingly towards him.

"Have you seen my brother Rand lately?"

"Nary."

"He has n't been here, or about the Ferry?"

"Nary time."

"You have n't heard," said Ruth, with a faint attempt at a smile, "if he 's been around here asking after me — sorter looking me up, you know?"

"Not much," returned the bar-keeper deliberately. "Ez far ez I know Rand — that ar brother o' yours — he 's one of yer high-toned chaps ez does n't drink, thinks bar-rooms is pizen, and ain't the sort to come round yer and sling yarns with me."

Ruth rose; but the hand that he placed upon the table, albeit a powerful one, trembled so that it was with difficulty he resumed his knapsack. When he did so, his bent figure, stooping shoulders, and haggard face made him appear another man from the one who had sat down. There was a slight touch of apologetic deference and humility in his manner as he paid his reckoning, and slowly and hesitatingly began to descend the steps.

The bar-keeper looked after him thoughtfully. "Well, dog my skin!" he ejaculated to himself, "ef I had n't seen that man — that same Ruth Pinkney — straddle a friend's body in this yer very room, and dare a whole crowd to come on, I 'd swar that he had n't any grit in him! Thar' s something up!"

But here Ruth reached the last step, and turned again.

"If you see old man Nixon, say I 'm in town; if you see that —— —— ——" (I regret to say that I cannot repeat his exact and brief characterization of the present condition and natal antecedents of Kanaka Joe), "say I 'm looking out for him," and was gone.

He wandered down the road towards the one long straggling street of the settlement. The few people who met him at that early hour greeted him with a kind of con-

strained civility; certain cautious souls hurried by without seeing him; all turned and looked after him, and a few followed him at a respectful distance. A somewhat notorious practical joker, and recognized wag at the Ferry, apparently awaited his coming with something of invitation and expectation, but catching sight of Ruth's haggard face and blazing eyes, became instantly practical and by no means jocular in his greeting. At the top of the hill, Ruth turned to look once more upon the distant mountain, now again a mere cloud-line on the horizon. In the firm belief that he would never again see the sun rise upon it, he turned aside into a hazel thicket, and tearing out a few leaves from his pocket-book, wrote two letters — one to Rand and one to Mornie; but which, as they were never delivered, shall not burden this brief chronicle of that eventful day. For while transcribing them, he was startled by the sounds of a dozen pistol-shots, in the direction of the hotel he had recently quitted. Something in the mere sound provoked the old hereditary fighting instinct, and sent him to his feet with a bound, and a slight distension of the nostrils and sniffing of the air not unknown to certain men who become half intoxicated by the smell of powder. He quickly folded his letters and addressed them carefully, and taking off his knapsack and blanket, methodically arranged them under a tree, with the letters on top. Then he examined the lock of his revolver, and then, with the step of a man ten years younger, leaped into the road. He had scarcely done so when he was seized, and by sheer force dragged into a blacksmith's shop at the roadside. He turned his savage face and drawn weapon upon his assailant, but was surprised to meet the anxious eyes of the bar-keeper of the Mansion House.

"Don't be a d—d fool!' said the man quickly. "Thar's fifty agin' you down thar. But why, in h—ll, did n't you wipe out old Nixon when you had such a good chance?"

"Wipe out old Nixon?" repeated Ruth.

"Yes, just now, when you had him covered!"

"What!"

The bar-keeper turned quickly upon Ruth, stared at him, and then suddenly burst into a fit of laughter. "Well! I've knowed you two were twins, but damn me if I ever thought I'd be sold like this." And he again burst into a roar of laughter.

"What do you mean?" demanded Ruth savagely.

"What do I mean?" returned the bar-keeper, "why, I mean this. I mean that your brother, Rand, as you call him, he'z bin — for a young feller, and a pious feller — doin' about the tallest kind o' fightin, to-day that's been done at the Ferry. He's laid out that ar Kanaka Joe and two of his chums! He was pitched into on your quarrel, and he took it up for you like a little man! I managed to drag him off, up yer, in the hazel bush for safety, and out you pops, and I thought you was him! He can't be far away. Hallo! There they're comin'; and thar's the doctor trying to keep them back!"

A crowd of angry excited faces filled the road suddenly, but before them Dr. Duchesne, mounted, and with a pistol in his hand, opposed their further progress.

"Back, in the bush!" whispered the bar-keeper. "Now's your time!"

But Ruth stirred not. "Go you back," he said, in a low voice; "find Rand, and take him away. I will fill his place here." He drew his revolver, and stepped into the road. A shout, a report, and the spatter of red dust from a bullet near his feet, told him he was recognized. He stirred not; but another shout, and a cry, "There they are — *both* of 'em!" made him turn.

His brother Rand, with a smile on his lip and fire in his eye, stood by his side! Neither spoke. Then Rand, quietly as of old, slipped his hand into his brother's strong

palm. Two or three bullets sang by them, a splinter flew from the blacksmith's shed, but the brothers, hard gripping each other's hands, and looking into each other's faces, with a quiet joy, stood there, calm and imperturbable.

There was a momentary pause. The voice of Dr. Duchesne rose above the crowd.

"Keep back, I say! Keep back! Or hear me! — for five years I 've worked among you, and mended and patched the holes you 've drilled through each other's carcasses — Keep back, I say! — Or the next man that pulls trigger, or steps forward, will get a hole from me that no surgeon can stop! I 'm sick of your bungling ball practice! Keep back! — or, by the living Jingo, I 'll show you where a man's vitals are!"

There was a burst of laughter from the crowd, and for a moment the twins were forgotten in this audacious speech and coolly impertinent presence.

"That 's right! Now let that infernal old hypocritical drunkard, Mat Nixon, step to the front."

The crowd parted right and left, and half pushed, half dragged Nixon before him.

"Gentlemen," said the doctor, "this is the man who has just shot at Rand Pinkney for hiding his daughter. Now, I tell you, gentlemen, and I tell him, that for the last week his daughter, Mornie Nixon, has been under my care as a patient, and my protection as a friend. If there 's anybody to be shot, the job must begin with me!"

There was another laugh, and a cry of "Bully for old Sawbones!" Ruth started convulsively, and Rand answered his look with a confirming pressure of his hand.

"That isn 't all, gentlemen, this drunken brute has just shot at a gentleman, whose only offense, to my knowledge, is that he has, for the last week, treated her with a brother's kindness, has taken her into his own home, and cared for her wants as if she were his own sister."

Ruth's hand again grasped his brother's. Rand colored, and hung his head.

"There 's more yet, gentlemen. I tell you that that girl, Mornie Nixon, has, to my knowledge, been treated like a lady, has been cared for as she never was cared for in her father's house, and while that father has been proclaiming her shame in every bar-room at the Ferry, has had the sympathy and care, night and day, of two of the most accomplished ladies of the Ferry — Mrs. Sol Saunders, gentlemen, and Miss Euphemia!"

There was a shout of approbation from the crowd. Nixon would have slipped away, but the doctor stopped him.

"Not yet! I've one thing more to say. I've to tell you, gentlemen, on my professional word of honor, that besides being an old hypocrite, this same old Mat Nixon is the ungrateful, unnatural *grandfather* of the first boy born in the district!"

A wild huzza greeted the doctor's climax. By a common consent the crowd turned toward the Twins, who, grasping each other's hands stood apart. The doctor nodded his head. The next moment the Twins were surrounded and lifted in the arms of the laughing throng, and borne in triumph to the bar-room of the Mansion House.

"Gentlemen," said the bar-keeper, "call for what you like: the Mansion House treats to-day in honor of its being the first time that Rand Pinkney has been admitted to the Bar."

. . . . . .

It was agreed that, as her condition was still precarious, the news should be broken to her gradually and indirectly.

The indefatigable Sol had a professional idea, which was not displeasing to the Twins. It being a lovely summer afternoon, the couch of Mornie was lifted out on the ledge, and she lay there basking in the sunlight, drinking in the pure air, and looking gravely ahead in the daylight as she

had in the darkness — for her couch commanded a view of the mountain flank. And lying there she dreamed a pleasant dream, and in her dream saw Rand returning up the mountain trail. She was half conscious that he had good news for her, and when he at last reached her bedside, he began gently and kindly to tell his news. But she heard him not, or rather in her dream was most occupied with his ways and manners, which seemed unlike him, yet inexpressibly sweet and tender. The tears were fast coming in her eyes, when he suddenly dropped on his knees beside her, threw away Rand's disguising hat and coat, and clasped her in his arms. And by that she *knew* it was Ruth!

But what they said; what hurried words of mutual explanation and forgiveness passed between them; what bitter yet tender recollections of hidden fears and doubts, now forever chased away in the rain of tears and joyous sunshine of that mountain top, were then whispered; whatever of this little chronicle, that to the reader seems strange and inconsistent, — as all human records must ever be strange and imperfect except to the actors — was then made clear, was never divulged by them, and must remain with them forever. The rest of the party had withdrawn and they were alone. But when Mornie turned and placed the baby in its father's arms, they were so isolated in their happiness, that the lower world beneath them might have swung and drifted away, and left that mountain top the beginning and creation of a better planet.

. . . . . .

"You know all about it now," said Sol, the next day explaining the previous episodes of this history of Ruth, "you 've got the whole plot before you. It dragged a little in the second act, for the actors were n't up in their parts. But, for an amateur performance, on the whole, it was n't bad."

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Rand impulsively "how we'd have got on without Euphemia. It's too bad, she could n't be here to-day."

"She wanted to come," said Sol, "but the gentleman she's engaged to came up from Marysville last night."

"Gentleman — engaged!" repeated Rand, white and red by turns.

"Well, yes! I say 'gentleman,' although he's in the Variety profession. She always said," said Sol quietly, looking at Rand, "that she'd never marry *out* of it."

JEFF BRIGGS'S LOVE STORY

I

It was raining and blowing at Eldridge's Crossing. From the stately pine-trees on the hill-tops, which were dignifiedly protesting through their rigid spines upward, to the hysterical willows in the hollow, that had whipped themselves into a maudlin fury, there was a general tumult. When the wind lulled, the rain kept up the distraction, firing long volleys across the road, letting loose miniature cataracts from the hill-sides to brawl in the ditches, and beating down the heavy heads of wild oats on the levels; when the rain ceased for a moment the wind charged over the already defeated field, ruffled the gulleys, scattered the spray from the roadside pines, and added insult to injury. But both wind and rain concentrated their energies in a malevolent attempt to utterly disperse and scatter the "Half-way House," which seemed to have wholly lost its way, and strayed into the open, where, dazed and bewildered, unprepared and unprotected, it was exposed to the taunting fury of the blast. A loose, shambling, disjointed, hastily built structure — representing the worst features of Pioneer renaissance — it rattled its loose window-sashes like chattering teeth, banged its ill-hung shutters, and admitted so much of the invading storm, that it might have blown up or blown down with equal facility.

Jefferson Briggs, proprietor and landlord of the "Half-way House," had just gone through the formality of closing his house for the night, hanging dangerously out of the window in the vain attempt to subdue a rebellious shutter

that had evidently entered into conspiracy with the invaders, and shutting a door as against a sheriff's posse, was going to bed — *i. e.*, to read himself asleep, as was his custom. As he entered his little bedroom in the attic with a highly exciting novel in his pocket and a kerosene lamp in his hand, the wind, lying in wait for him, instantly extinguished his lamp and slammed the door behind him. Jefferson Briggs relighted the lamp, as if confidentially, in a corner, and shielding it in the bosom of his red flannel shirt, which gave him the appearance of an illuminated shrine, hung a heavy bearskin across the window, and then carefully deposited his lamp upon a chair at his bedside. This done, he kicked off his boots, flung them into a corner, and rolling himself in a blanket, lay down upon the bed. A habit of early rising, bringing with it, presumably, the proverbial accompaniment of health, wisdom, and pecuniary emoluments, had also brought with it certain ideas of the effeminacy of separate toilettes and the virtue of readiness.

In a few moments he was deep in a chapter.

A vague pecking at his door — as of an unseasonable woodpecker, finally asserted itself to his consciousness. "Come in," he said, with his eye still on the page.

The door opened to a gaunt figure, partly composed of bed-quilt and partly of plaid shawl. A predominance of the latter and a long wisp of iron-gray hair determined her sex. She leaned against the post with an air of fatigue, half moral and half physical.

"How ye kin lie thar, abed, Jeff, and read and smoke on sich a night! The sperrit o' the Lord abroad over the yearth — and up stage not gone by yet. Well, well! it 's well thar ez *some* ez *can't* sleep."

"The up coach, like as not, is stopped by high water on the North Fork, ten miles away, aunty," responded Jeff, keeping to the facts. Possibly not recognizing the hand of a beneficent Creator in the rebellious window shutter, he avoided theology.

"Well," responded the figure, with an air of delivering an unheeded and thankless warning, "it is not for *me* to say. P'raps it 's all His wisdom that some will keep to their own mind. It 's well ez some hez n't narves, and kin luxuriate in terbacker in the night watches. But He says, 'I 'll come like a thief in the night!' — like a thief in the night, Jeff."

Totally unable to reconcile this illustration with the delayed "Pioneer" coach and Yuba Bill, its driver, Jeff lay silent. In his own way, perhaps, he was uneasy — not to say shocked — at his aunt's habitual freedom of scriptural quotation, as that good lady herself was with an occasional oath from his lips; a fact, by the way, not generally understood by purveyors of Scripture, licensed and unlicensed.

"I 'd take a pull at them bitters, aunty," said Jeff feebly, with his wandering eye still recurring to his page. "They 'll do ye a power of good in the way o' calmin' yer narves."

"Ef I was like some folks I would n't want bitters — though made outer the simplest yarbs of the yearth, with jest enough sperrit to bring out the vartoos — ez Deacon Stoer's Balm 'er Gilead is — what yer meaning? Ef I was like some folks I could lie thar and smoke in the lap o' idleness — with fourteen beds in the house empty, and nary lodger for one of 'em. Ef I was that indifferent to havin' invested my fortin in the good will o' this house, and not ez much ez a single transient lookin' in, I could lie down and take comfort in profane literatoor. But it ain't in me to do it. And it was n't your father's way, Jeff, neither!"

As the elder Briggs's way had been to seek surcease from such trouble at the gambling table, and eventually, in suicide, Jeff could not deny it. But he did not say that a full realization of his unhappy venture overcame him as he closed the blinds of the hotel that night; and that the half desperate idea of abandoning it then and there to the warring elements that had resented his trespass on Nature

seemed to him an act of simple reason and justice. He did not say this, for easy-going natures are not apt to explain the processes by which their content or resignation is reached, and are therefore supposed to have none. Keeping to the facts, he simply suggested the weather was unfavorable to travelers, and again found his place on the page before him. Fixing it with his thumb, he looked up resignedly. The figure wearily detached itself from the door-post, and Jeff's eyes fell on his book. "You won't stop, aunty?" he asked mechanically, as if reading aloud from the page; but she was gone.

A little ashamed, although much relieved, Jeff fell back again to literature, interrupted only by the charging of the wind and the heavy volleys of rain. Presently he found himself wondering if a certain banging were really a shutter, and then, having settled in his mind that it *was*, he was startled by a shout. Another, and in the road before the house!

Jeff put down his book, and marked the place by turning down the leaf, being one of that large class of readers whose mental faculties are butter-fingered, and easily slip their hold. Then he resumed his boots and was duly caparisoned. He extinguished the kerosene lamp, and braved the outer air, and strong currents of the hall and stairway in the darkness. Lighting two candles in the bar-room, he proceeded to unlock the hall door. At the same instant a furious blast shook the house, the door yielded slightly and impelled a thin, meek-looking stranger violently against Jeff who still struggled with it.

"An accident has occurred," began the stranger, "and" — but here the wind charged again, blew open the door, pinned Jeff behind it back against the wall, overturned the dripping stranger, dashed up the staircase, and slammed every door in the house, ending triumphantly with No. 14 and a crash of glass in the window.

"Come, rouse up!" said Jeff, still struggling with the door, "rouse up and lend a hand yer!"

Thus abjured, the stranger crept along the wall towards Jeff and began again, "We have met with an accident." But here another and mightier gust left him speechless, covered him with spray of a wildly disorganized water-spout that, dangling from the roof, seemed to be playing on the front door, drove him into black obscurity and again sandwiched his host between the door and the wall. Then there was a lull, and in the midst of it, Yuba Bill, driver of the "Pioneer" coach, quietly and coolly, impervious in waterproof, walked into the hall, entered the bar-room, took a candle, and going behind the bar, selected a bottle, critically examined it, and returning, poured out a quantity of whiskey in a glass and gulped it in a single draught. All this while Jeff was closing the door, and the meek-looking man was coming into the light again.

Yuba Bill squared his elbows behind him and rested them on the bar, crossed his legs easily and awaited them. In reply to Jeff's inquiring but respectful look, he said shortly —

"Oh, you 're thar, are ye?"

"Yes, Bill."

"Well, this yer new-fangled road o' yours is ten feet deep in the hollow with back water from the North Fork! I 've taken that yar coach inter fower feet of it, and then I reckoned I could n't hev any more. 'I 'll stand on this yer hand,' sez I; I brought the horses up yer and landed 'em in your barn to eat their blessed heads off till the water goes down. That 's wot 's the matter old man, and jist about wot I kalkilated on from those durned old improvements o' yours."

Coloring a little at this new count in the general indictment against the uselessness of the "Half-way House," Jeff asked if there were "any passengers?"

Yuba Bill indicated the meek stranger with a jerk of his thumb. "And his wife and darter in the coach. They 're all right and tight, ez if they was in the Fifth Avenue Hotel. But I reckon he allows to fetch 'em up yer," added Bill, as if he strongly doubted the wisdom of the transfer.

The meek man, much meeker for the presence of Bill, here suggested that such indeed was his wish, and further prayed that Jeff would accompany him to the coach to assist in bringing them up. "It 's rather wet and dark," said the man apologetically; "my daughter is not strong. Have you such a thing as a waterproof?"

Jeff had not; but would a bear-skin do?

It would.

Jeff ran, tore down his extempore window curtain, and returned with it. Yuba Bill, who had quietly and disapprovingly surveyed the proceeding, here disengaged himself from the bar with evident reluctance.

"You 'll want another man," he said to Jeff, "onless ye can carry double. Ez *he*," indicating the stranger, "ez no sort o' use, he 'd better stay here and 'tend bar,' while you and me fetch the wimmen off. 'Specially ez I reckon we 've got to do some tall wadin' by this time to reach 'em."

The meek man sat down helplessly in a chair indicated by Bill, who at once strode after Jeff. In another moment they were both fighting their way, step by step, against the storm, in that peculiar, drunken, spasmodic way so amusing to the spectator and so exasperating to the performer. It was no time for conversation, even interjectional profanity was dangerously exhaustive.

The coach was scarcely a thousand yards away, but its bright lights were reflected in a sheet of dark silent water that stretched between it and the two men. Wading and splashing they soon reached it, and a gulley where the

surplus water was pouring into the valley below. "Fower feet o' water round her, but can't get any higher. So ye see she 's all right for a month o' sich weather." Inwardly admiring the perspicacity of his companion, Jeff was about to open the coach door when Bill interrupted.

"I 'll pack the old woman, if you 'll look arter the darter and enny little traps."

A female face, anxious and elderly, here appeared at the window.

"Thet 's my little game," said Bill, *sotto voce.*

"Is there any danger? where is my husband?" asked the woman impatiently.

"Ez to the danger, ma'am, — thar ain't any. Yer ez safe *here* ez ye 'd be in a Sacramento steamer; ez to your husband, he allowed I was to come yer and fetch yer up to the hotel. That 's his look-out!" With this cheering speech, Bill proceeded to make two or three ineffectual scoops into the dark interior, manifestly with the idea of scooping out the lady in question. In another instant he had caught her, lifted her gently but firmly in his arms, and was turning away.

"But my child! — my daughter! she 's asleep!" — expostulated the woman; but Bill was already swiftly splashing through the darkness. Jeff, left to himself, hastily examined the coach: on the back seat a slight small figure, enveloped in a shawl, lay motionless. Jeff threw the bear-skin over it gently, lifted it on one arm, and gathering a few travelling bags and baskets with the other, prepared to follow his quickly disappearing leader. A few feet from the coach the water appeared to deepen, and the bear-skin to draggle. Jeff drew the figure up higher, in vain.

"Sis," he said softly.

No reply.

"Sis," shaking her gently.

There was a slight movement within the wrappings.

"Could n't ye climb up on my shoulder, honey? that 's a good child!"

There were one or two spasmodic jerks of the bear-skin, and, aided by Jeff, the bundle was presently seated on his shoulder.

"Are you all right now, Sis?"

Something like a laugh came from the bear-skin. Then a childish voice said, "Thank you, I think I am!"

"Ain't you afraid you 'll fall off?"

"A little."

Jeff hesitated. It was begining to blow again.

"You could n't reach down and put your arm round my neck, could ye, honey?"

"I am afraid not!" — although there *was* a slight attempt to do so.

"No?"

"No!"

"Well, then, take a good holt, a firm strong holt, o' my hair! Don't be afraid!"

A small hand timidly began to rummage in Jeff's thick curls.

"Take a firm holt; thar, just back o' my neck! That 's right."

The little hand closed over half a dozen curls. The little figure shook, and giggled.

"Now don't you see, honey, if I 'm keerless with you, and don't keep you plump level up thar, you jist give me a pull and fetch me up all standing!"

"I see!"

"Of course you do! That 's because you 're a little lady!"

Jeff strode on. It was pleasant to feel the soft warm fingers in his hair, pleasant to hear the faint childish voice, pleasant to draw the feet of the enwrapped figure against his broad breast. Altogether he was sorry when they

reached the dry land and the lee of the "Half-way House," where a slight movement of the figure expressed a wish to dismount.

"Not yet, missy," said Jeff; "not yet! You 'll get blown away, sure! And then what 'll they say? No, honey! I 'll take you right in to your papa, just as ye are!"

A few steps more and Jeff strode into the hall, made his way to the sitting-room, walked to the sofa, and deposited his burden. The bear-skin fell back, the shawl fell back, and Jeff — fell back too! For before him lay a small, slight, but beautiful and perfectly formed woman.

He had time to see that the meek man, no longer meek, but apparently a stern uncompromising parent, was standing at the head of the sofa; that the elderly and nervous female was hovering at the foot, that his aunt, with every symptom of religious and moral disapproval of his conduct, sat rigidly in one of the rigid chairs — he had time to see all this before the quick, hot blood, flying to his face, sent the water into his eyes, and he could see nothing!

The cause of all this smiled — a dazzling smile though a faint one — that momentarily lit up the austere gloom of the room and its occupants. "You must thank this gentleman, papa," said she, languidly turning to her father, "for his kindness and his trouble. He has carried me here as gently and as carefully as if I were a child." Seeing symptoms of a return of Jeff's distress in his coloring face, she added softly, as if to herself, "It 's a great thing to be strong — a greater thing to be strong *and* gentle."

The voice thrilled through Jeff. But into this dangerous human music twanged the accents of special spiritual revelation, and called him to himself again, "Be ye wise as sarpints, but harmless as duvs," said Jeff's aunt, generally, "and let 'em be thankful ez does n't aboos the stren'th the Lord gives 'em, but be allers ready to answer for it at

the bar o' their Maker." Possibly some suggestion in her figure of speech reminded her of Jeff's forgotten duties, so she added in the same breath and tone, "especially when transient customers is waiting for their licker, and Yuba Bill hammerin' on the counter with his glass; and yer ye stand, Jeff, never even takin' up that wet bar-skin — enuff to give that young woman her death."

Stammering out an incoherent apology, addressed vaguely to the occupants of the room, but looking toward the languid goddess on the sofa, Jeff seized the bear-skin and backed out the door. Then he flew to his room with it, and then returned to the bar-room; but the impatient William of Yuba had characteristically helped himself and gone off to the stable. Then Jeff stole into the hall and halted before the closed door of the sitting-room. A bold idea of going in again, as became a landlord of the "Half-way House," with an inquiry if they wished anything further, had seized him, but the remembrance that he had always meekly allowed that duty to devolve upon his aunt, and that she would probably resent it with scriptural authority and bring him to shame again, stayed his timid knuckles at the door. In this hesitation he stumbled upon his aunt coming down the stairs with an armful of blankets and pillows, attended by their small Indian servant, staggering under a mattress.

"Is everything all right, aunty?"

"Ye kin be thankful to the Lord, Jeff Briggs, that this did n't happen last week when I was down on my back with rheumatiz. But ye 're never grateful."

"The young lady — is *she* comfortable?" said Jeff, accepting his aunt's previous remark as confirmatory.

"Ez well ez enny critter marked by the finger of the Lord with gallopin' consumption kin be, I reckon. And she, ez oughter be putting off airthly vanities, askin' for a lookin'-glass! And you! trapesin' through the hall with her

on yer shoulder, and dancin' and jouncin' her up and down ez if it was a ball-room!" A guilty recollection that he had skipped with her through the passage struck him with remorse as his aunt went on: "It 's a mercy that betwixt you and the wet bar-skin she ain't got her deth!"

"Don't ye think, aunty," stammered Jeff, "that — that — my bein' the landlord, yer know, it would be the square thing — just out o' respect, ye know — for me to drop in thar and ask 'em if thar 's anythin' they wanted?"

His aunt stopped, and resignedly put down the pillows. "Sarah," she said meekly to the handmaiden, "ye kin leave go that mattress. Yer 's Mr. Jefferson thinks we ain't good enough to make the beds for them two city women folks, and he allows he 'll do it himself!"

"No, no! aunty!" began the horrified Jeff; but failing to placate his injured relative, took safety in flight.

Once safe in his own room his eye fell on the bear-skin. It certainly *was* wet. Perhaps he had been careless — perhaps he had imperiled her life! His cheeks flushed as he threw it hastily in the corner. Something fell from it to the floor. Jeff picked it up and held it to the light. It was a small, a very small, lady's slipper. Holding it within the palm of his hand as if it had been some delicate flower which the pressure of a finger might crush, he strode to the door, but stopped. Should he give it to his aunt? Even if she overlooked this evident proof of *his* carelessness, what would she think of the young lady's? Ought he — seductive thought! — go downstairs again, knock at the door, and give it to its fair owner, with the apology he was longing to make? Then he remembered that he had but a few moments before been dismissed the room very much as if he were the original proprietor of the skin he had taken. Perhaps they were right; perhaps he *was* only a foolish clumsy animal! Yet *she* had thanked him — she had said in her sweet childlike voice, "It is a great thing to be

strong; a greater thing to be strong and gentle." He *was* strong; strong men had said so. He did not know if he was gentle too. Had she meant *that*, when she turned her strangely soft dark eyes upon him? For some moments he held the slipper hesitatingly in his hand, then he opened his trunk, and disposing various articles around it as if it were some fragile, perishable object, laid it carefully therein.

This done, he drew off his boots, and rolling himself in his blanket, lay down upon the bed. He did not open his novel — he did not follow up the exciting love episode of his favorite hero — so ungrateful is humanity to us poor romancers, in the first stages of their real passion. Ah, me! 'tis the jongleurs and troubadours they want then, not us! When Master Slender, sick for sweet Anne Page, would "rather than forty shillings" he had his "book of songs and sonnets" there, what availed it that the Italian Boccaccio had contemporaneously discoursed wisely and sweetly of love in prose? I doubt not that Master Jeff would have mumbled some verse to himself had he known any: knowing none, he lay there and listened to the wind.

Did she hear it; did it keep her awake? He had an uneasy suspicion that the shutter that was banging so outrageously was the shutter of her room. Filled with this miserable thought, he arose softly, stole down the staircase, and listened. The sound was repeated. It was truly the refractory shutter of No. 7 — the best bedroom adjoining the sitting-room. The next room, No. 8, was vacant. Jeff entered it softly, as softly opened the window, and leaning far out in the tempest, essayed to secure the nocturnal disturber. But in vain. Cord or rope he had none, nor could he procure either without alarming his aunt — an extremity not to be considered. Jeff was a man of clumsy but forceful expedients. He hung far out of the window, and with one powerful hand, lifted the shutter

off its hinges and dragged it softly into No. 8. Then as softly he crept upstairs to bed. The wind howled and tore round the house; the crazy water-pipe below Jeff's window creaked, the chimneys whistled, but the shutter banged no more. Jeff began to doze. "It 's a great thing to be strong," the wind seemed to say as it charged upon the defenseless house, and then another voice seemed to reply, "A greater thing to be strong and gentle;" and hearing this he fell asleep.

II

It was not yet daylight when he awoke with an idea that brought him hurriedly to his feet. Quickly dressing himself, he began to count the money in his pocket. Apparently the total was not satisfactory, as he endeavored to augment it by loose coins fished from the pockets of his other garments, and from the corner of his washstand drawer. Then he cautiously crept downstairs, seized his gun, and stole out of the still sleeping house. The wind had gone down, the rain had ceased, a few stars shone steadily in the north, and the shapeless bulk of the coach, its lamps extinguished, loomed high and dry above the lessening water, in the twilight. With a swinging tread Jeff strode up the hill and was soon upon the highway and stage road. A half-hour's brisk walk brought him to the summit, and the first rosy flashes of morning light. This enabled him to knock over half-a-dozen early quail, lured by the proverb, who were seeking their breakfast in the chapparal, and gave him courage to continue on his mission, which his perplexed face and irresolute manner had for the last few moments shown to be an embarrassing one. At last the white fences and imposing outbuildings of the "Summit Hotel" rose before him, and he uttered a deep sigh. There, basking in the first rays of the morning sun,

stood his successful rival! Jeff looked at the well-built, comfortable structure, the commanding site, and the air of serene independence that seemed to possess it, and no longer wondered that the great world passed him by to linger and refresh itself there.

He was relieved to find the landlord was not present in person, and so confided his business to the bar-keeper. At first it appeared that that functionary declined interference, and with many head-shakings and audible misgivings was inclined to await the coming of his principal, but a nearer view of Jeff's perplexed face, and an examination of Jeff's gun, and the few coins spread before him, finally induced him to produce certain articles, which he packed in a basket and handed to Jeff, taking the gun and coins in exchange. Thus relieved, Jeff set his face homewards, and ran a race with the morning into the valley, reaching the "Half-way House" as the sun laid waste its bare, bleak outlines, and relentlessly pointed out its defects one by one. It was cruel to Jeff at that moment, but he hugged his basket close and slipped to the back door and the kitchen, where his aunt was already at work.

"I did n't know ye were up yet, aunty," said Jeff submissively. "It is n't more than six o'clock."

"Thar 's four more to feed at breakfast," said his aunt severely, "and yer 's the top blown off the kitchen chimbly, and the fire only just got to go."

Jeff saw that he was in time. The ordinary breakfast of the "Half-way House," not yet prepared, consisted of codfish, ham, yellow-ochre biscuit, made after a peculiar receipt of his aunt's, and potatoes.

"I got a few fancy fixin's up at the Summit this morning, aunty," he began apologetically, "seein' we had sick folks, you know — you and the young lady — and thinkin' it might save you trouble. I 've got 'em here," and he shyly produced the basket.

"If ye kin afford it, Jeff," responded his aunt resignedly, "I 'm thankful."

The reply was so unexpectedly mild for Aunt Sally, that Jeff put his arms around her and kissed her hard cheek. "And I 've got some quail, aunty, knowin' you liked 'em."

"I reckoned you was up to some such foolishness," said Aunt Sally, wiping her cheek with her apron, "when I missed yer gun from the hall." But the allusion was a dangerous one, and Jeff slipped away.

He breakfasted early with Yuba Bill that morning; the latter gentleman's taciturnity being intensified at such moments through a long habit of confining himself strictly to eating in the limited time allowed his daily repasts, and it was not until they had taken the horses from the stable and were harnessing them to the coach that Jeff extracted from his companion some facts about his guests. They were Mr. and Mrs. Mayfield, Eastern tourists, who had been to the Sandwich Islands for the benefit of their daughter's health, and before returning to New York, intended, under the advice of their physician, to further try the effects of mountain air at the "Summit Hotel," on the invalid. They were apparently rich people, the coach had been engaged for them solely — even the mail and express had been sent on by a separate conveyance, so that they might be more independent. It is hardly necessary to say that this fact was by no means palatable to Bill — debarring him not only the social contact and attentions of the "Express Agent," but the selection of a box-seated passenger who always "acted like a man."

"Ye kin kalkilate what kind of a pardner that 'ar yaller-livered Mayfield would make up on that box, partik'ly ez I heard before we started that he 'd requested the kimpany's agent in Sacramento to select a driver ez did n't cuss, smoke, or drink. He did, sir, by gum!"

"I reckon you were very careful, then, Bill," said Jeff.

"In course," returned Bill, with a perfectly diabolical wink. "In course! You know that 'Blue Grass,'" pointing out a spirited leader; "she 's a fair horse ez horses go, but she 's apt to feel her oats on a down grade, and takes a pow'ful deal o' soothin' and explanation afore she buckles down to her reg'lar work. Well, sir, I exhorted and labored in a Christian-like way with that mare to that extent that I 'm cussed if that chap did n't want to get down afore we got to the level!"

"And the ladies?" asked Jeff, whose laugh — possibly from his morning's experience — was not as ready as formerly.

"The ladies! Ef you mean that 'ar livin' skellington I packed up to yer house," said Bill promptly, "it 's a pair of them in size and color, and ready for any first-class undertaker's team in the kintry. Why, you remember that curve on Break Neck hill, where the leaders allus look as if they was alongside o' the coach and faced the other way? Well, that woman sticks her skull outer the window, and sez she, confidential-like to old yaller-belly, sez she, 'William Henry,' sez she, 'tell that man his horses are running away!'"

"You did n't get to see the — the — daughter, Bill, did you?" asked Jeff, whose laugh had become quite uneasy.

"No, I did n't," said Bill, with sudden and inexplicable vehemence, "and the less *you* see of her, Jefferson Briggs, the better for you."

Too confounded and confused by Bill's manner to question further, Jeff remained silent until they drew up at the door of the "Half-way House." But here another surprise awaited him. Mr. Mayfield, erect and dignified, stood upon the front porch as the coach drove up.

"Driver!" began Mr. Mayfield.

There was no reply.

"Driver," said Mr. Mayfield, slightly weakening under Bill's eye, "I shall want you no longer. I have" —

"Is he speaking to me?" said Bill audibly to Jeff, "'cause they call me 'Yuba Bill' yer abouts."

"He is," said Jeff hastily.

"Mebbee he's drunk," said Bill audibly; "a drop or two afore breakfast sometimes upsets his kind."

"I was saying, Bill," said Mr. Mayfield, becoming utterly limp and weak again under Bill's cold gray eyes, "that I've changed my mind, and shall stop here awhile. My daughter seems already benefited by the change. You can take my traps from the boot and leave them here."

Bill laid down his lines resignedly, coolly surveyed Mr. Mayfield, the house, and the half-pleased, half-frightened Jeff, and then proceeded to remove the luggage from the boot, all the while whistling loud and offensive incredulity. Then he climbed back to his box. Mr. Mayfield, completely demoralized under this treatment, as a last resort essayed patronage.

"You can say to the Sacramento agents, Bill, that I am entirely satisfied, and" —

"Ye need n't fear but I'll give ye a good character," interrupted Bill coolly, gathering up his lines. The whip snapped, the six horses dashed forward as one, the coach plunged down the road and was gone.

With its disappearance, Mr. Mayfield stiffened slightly again. "I have just told your aunt, Mr. Briggs," he said, turning upon Jeff, "that my daughter has expressed a desire to remain here a few days; she has slept well, seems to be invigorated by the air, and although we expected to go on to the 'Summit,' Mrs. Mayfield and myself are willing to accede to her wishes. Your house seems to be new and clean. Your table — judging from the breakfast this morning — is quite satisfactory."

Jeff, in the first flush of delight at this news, forgot what

that breakfast had cost him — forgot all his morning's experience, and, I fear, when he did remember it, was too full of a vague, hopeful courage to appreciate it. Conscious of showing too much pleasure, he affected the necessity of an immediate interview with his aunt, in the kitchen. But his short cut round the house was arrested by a voice and figure. It was Miss Mayfield, wrapped in a shawl and seated in a chair, basking in the sunlight at one of the bleakest and barest angles of the house. Jeff stopped in a delicious tremor.

As we are dealing with facts, however, it would be well to look at the cause of this tremor with our own eyes and not Jeff's. To be plain, my dear madam, as she basked in that remorseless, matter-of-fact California sunshine, she looked her full age — twenty-five, if a day! There were wrinkles in the corners of her dark eyes, contracted and frowning in that strong, merciless light; there was a nervous pallor in her complexion; but being one of those "fast-colored" brunettes, whose dyes are a part of their temperament, no sickness nor wear could bleach it out. The red of her small mouth was darker than yours, I wot, and there were certain faint lines from the corners of her delicate nostrils indicating alternate repression and excitement under certain experiences, which are not found in the classic ideals. Now Jeff knew nothing of the classic ideal — did not know that a thousand years ago certain sensual idiots had, with brush and chisel, inflicted upon the world the personification of the strongest and most delicate, most controlling and most subtle passion that humanity is capable of, in the likeness of a thick-waisted, idealess, expressionless, perfectly contented female animal; and that thousands of idiots had since then insisted upon perpetuating this model for the benefit of a world that had gone on sighing for, pining for, fighting for, and occasionally blowing its brains out over types far removed from that idiotic standard.

Consequently Jeff saw only a face full of possibilities and probabilities, framed in a small delicate oval, saw a slight woman's form — more than usually small — and heard a low voice, to him full of gentle pride, passion, pathos, and human weakness, and was helpless.

"I only said 'Good-morning,'" said Miss Mayfield, with that slight, arch satisfaction in the observation of masculine bashfulness, which the best of her sex cannot forego.

"Thank you, miss; good-morning. I've been wanting to say to you that I hope you was n't mad, you know," stammered Jeff, desperately intent upon getting off his apology.

"It is *so* lovely this morning — such a change!" continued Miss Mayfield.

"Yes, miss! You know I reckoned — at least what your father said, made me kalkilate that you" —

Miss Mayfield, still smiling, knitted her brows and went on: "I slept so well last night," she said gratefully, "and feel so much better this morning, that I ventured out. I seem to be drinking in health in this clear sunlight."

"Certainly miss. As I was sayin', your father says his daughter is in the coach; and Bill says, says he to me, 'I 'll pack — I 'll carry the old — I 'll bring up Mrs. Mayfield, if you 'll bring up the daughter;' and when we come to the coach I saw you asleep-like in the corner, and bein' small, why miss, you know how nat'ral it is, I" —

"Oh, Mr. Jeff! Mr. Briggs!" said Miss Mayfield plaintively, "don't, please — don't spoil the best compliment I've had in many a year. You thought I was a child, I know, and — well, you find," she said audaciously, suddenly bringing her black eyes to bear on him like a rifle, "you find — well?"

What Jeff thought was inaudible but not invisible. Miss Mayfield saw enough of it in his eye to protest with a faint color in her cheek. Thus does Nature betray itself to Nature the world over.

The color faded. "It's a dreadful thing to be so weak and helpless, and to put everybody to such trouble, is n't it, Mr. Jeff? I beg your pardon — your aunt calls you Jeff."

"Please call me Jeff," said Jeff, to his own surprise rapidly gaining courage. "Everybody calls me that."

Miss Mayfield smiled. "I suppose I must do what *everybody* does. So it seems that we are to give you the trouble of keeping us here until I get better or worse?"

"Yes, miss."

"Therefore I won't detain you now. I only wanted to thank you for your gentleness last night, and to assure you that the bear-skin did *not* give me my death."

She smiled and nodded her small head, and wrapped her shawl again closely around her shoulders, and turned her eyes upon the mountains, gestures which the now quick-minded Jeff interpreted as a gentle dismissal, and flew to seek his aunt.

Here he grew practical. Ready money was needed; for the "Half-way House" was such a public monument of ill-luck, that Jeff had no credit. He must keep up the table to the level of that fortunate breakfast — to do which he had $1.50 in the till, left by Bill, and $2.50 produced by his Aunt Sally from her work-basket.

"Why not ask Mr. Mayfield to advance ye suthin?" said Aunt Sally.

The blood flew to Jeff's face. "Never! Don't say that again, aunty."

The tone and manner were so unlike Jeff that the old lady sat down half frightened, and taking the corners of her apron in her hands began to whimper.

"Thar now, aunty! I did n't mean nothin', — only if you care to have me about the place any longer, and I reckon it's little good I am any way," he added, with a new-found bitterness in his tone, "ye'll not ask me to do that."

"What 's gone o' ye, Jeff?" said his aunt lugubriously; "ye ain't nat'ral like."

Jeff laughed. "See here, aunty; I 'm goin' to take your advice. You know Rabbit?"

"The mare?"

"Yes; I 'm going to sell her. The blacksmith offered me a hundred dollars for her last week."

"Ef ye 'd done that a month ago, Jeff, ez I wanted ye to, instead o' keeping the brute to eat ye out o' house and home, ye 'd be better off." Aunt Sally never let slip an opportunity to "improve the occasion," but preferred to exhort over the prostrate body of the "improved." "Well, I hope he may n't change his mind."

Jeff smiled at such suggestion regarding the best horse within fifty miles of the "Half-way House." Nevertheless he went briskly to the stable, led out and saddled a handsome grey mare, petting her the while, and keeping up a running commentary of caressing epithets to which Rabbit responded with a whinny and playful reaches after Jeff's red flannel sleeve. Whereat Jeff, having loved the horse until it was displaced by another mistress, grew grave and suddenly threw his arms around Rabbit's neck, and then taking Rabbit's nose, thrust it in the bosom of his shirt and held it there silently for a moment. Rabbit becoming uneasy, Jeff's mood changed too, and having caparisoned himself and charger in true vaquero style, not without a little Mexican dandyism as to the set of his doeskin trousers, and the tie of his red sash, put a sombrero rakishly on his curls and leaped into the saddle.

Jeff was a fair rider in a country where riding was understood as a natural instinct, and not as a purely artificial habit of horse and rider, consequently he was not perched up, jockey fashion, with a knee-grip for his body, and a rein-rest for his arms on the beast's mouth, but rode with long, loose stirrups, his legs clasping the barrel of his

horse, his single rein lying loose upon her neck, leaving her head free as the wind. After this fashion he had often emerged from a cloud of dust on the red mountain road, striking admiration into the hearts of the wayfarers and coach-passengers, and leaving a trail of pleasant incense in the dust behind him. It was therefore with considerable confidence in himself, and a little human vanity, that he dashed round the house, and threw his mare skilfully on her haunches exactly a foot before Miss Mayfield — himself a resplendent vision of flying riata, crimson scarf, fawn-colored trousers, and jingling silver spurs.

"Kin I do anythin' for ye, miss, at the Forks?"

Miss Mayfield looked up quietly. "I think not," she said indifferently, as if the flaming-Jeff was a very common occurrence.

Jeff here permitted the mare to bolt fifty yards, caught her up sharply, swung her round on her off hind heel, permitted her to paw the air once or twice with her white-stockinged fore-feet, and then, with another dash forward, pulled her up again just before she apparently took Miss Mayfield and her chair in a running leap.

"Are you sure, miss?" asked Jeff, with a flushed face and a rather lugubrious voice.

"Quite so, thank you," she said coldly, looking past this centaur to the wooded mountain beyond.

Jeff, thoroughly crushed, was pacing meekly away when a childlike voice stopped him.

"If you are going near a carpenter's shop you might get a new shutter for my window; it blew away last night."

"It did, miss?"

"Yes," said the shrill voice of Aunt Sally, from the doorway, "in course it did! Ye must be crazy, Jeff, for thar it stands in No. 8, whar ye must have put it after ye picked it up outside."

Jeff, conscious that Miss Mayfield's eyes were on his

suffused face, stammered "that he would attend to it," and put spurs to the mare, eager only to escape.

It was not his only discomfiture; for the blacksmith, seeing Jeff's nervousness and anxiety, was suspicious of something wrong, as the world is apt to be, and appeased his conscience after the worldly fashion, by driving a hard bargain with the doubtful brother in affliction — the morality of a horse trade residing always with the seller. Whereby Master Jeff received only eighty dollars for horse and outfit — worth at least two hundred — and was also mulcted of forty dollars, principal and interest for past service of the blacksmith. Jeff walked home with forty dollars in his pocket — capital to prosecute his honest calling of innkeeper; the blacksmith retired to an adjoining tavern to discuss Jeff's affairs, and further reduce his credit. Yet I doubt which was the happier — the blacksmith estimating his possible gains, and doubtful of some uncertain sequence in his luck, or Jeff, temporarily relieved, boundlessly hopeful, and filled with the vague delights of a first passion. The only discontented brute in the whole transaction was poor Rabbit, who, missing certain attentions, became indignant, after the manner of her sex, bit a piece out of her crib, kicked a hole in her box, and receiving a bad character from the blacksmith, gave a worse one to her late master.

Jeff's purchases were of a temporary and ornamental quality, but not always judicious as a permanent investment. Overhearing some remark from Miss Mayfield concerning the dangerous character of the two-tined steel fork, which was part of the table equipage of the "Half-way House," he purchased half a dozen of what his aunt was pleased to specify as "split spoons," and thereby lost his late good standing with her. He not only repaired the window-shutter, but tempered the glaring window itself with a bit of curtain; he half carpeted Miss Mayfield's bed-room with

wild-cat skins and the now historical bear-skin, and felt himself overpaid when that young lady, passing the soft tabby-skins across her cheek, declared they were "lovely." For Miss Mayfield, deprecating slaughter in the abstract, accepted its results gratefully, like the rest of her sex, and while willing to "let the hart ungalled play," nevertheless was able to console herself with its venison. The woods, besides yielding aid and comfort of this kind to the distressed damsel, were flamboyant with vivid spring blossoms, and Jeff lit up the cold, white walls of her virgin cell with demonstrative color, and made — what his aunt, a cleanly soul, whose ideas of that quality were based upon the absence of any color whatever, called — "a litter."

The result of which was to make Miss Mayfield, otherwise languid and *ennuyée*, welcome Jeff's presence with a smile; to make Jeff, otherwise anxious, eager, and keenly attentive, mute and silent in her presence. Two symptoms bad for Jeff.

Meantime Mr. Mayfield's small conventional spirit pined for fellowship, only to be found in larger civilizations, and sought, under plea of business, a visit to Sacramento, where a few of the Mayfield type, still surviving, were to be found.

This was a relief to Jeff, who only through his regard for the daughter, was kept from open quarrel with the father. He fancied Miss Mayfield felt relieved too, although Jeff had noticed that Mayfield had deferred to his daughter more often than his wife — over whom your conventional small autocrat is always victorious. It takes the legal matrimonial contract to properly develop the first-class tyrant, male or female.

On one of these days Jeff was returning through the woods from marketing at the Forks, which, since the sale of Rabbit, had become a foot-sore and tedious business. He had reached the edge of the forest, and through the

wider-spaced trees, the bleak sunlit plateau of his house was beginning to open out, when he stopped instantly. I know not what Jeff had been thinking of, as he trudged along, but here, all at once, he was thrilled and possessed with the odor of some faint, foreign perfume. He flushed a little at first, and then turned pale. Now the woods were as full of as delicate, as subtle, as grateful, and, I wot, far healthier and purer odors than this; but this represented to Jeff the physical contiguity of Miss Mayfield, who had the knack — peculiar to some of her sex — of selecting a perfume that ideally identified her. Jeff looked around cautiously; at the foot of a tree hard by lay one of her wraps, still redolent of her. Jeff put down the bag which, in lieu of a market basket, he was carrying on his shoulder, and with a blushing face hid it behind a tree. It contained her dinner!

He took a few steps forwards with an assumption of ease and unconsciousness. Then he stopped, for not a hundred yards distant sat Miss Mayfield on a mossy boulder, her cloak hanging from her shoulders, her hands clasped round her crossed knees, and one little foot out — an exasperating combination of Evangeline and little Red Riding Hood in everything, I fear, but credulousness and self-devotion. She looked up as he walked towards her (*non constat* that the little witch had not already seen him half a mile away!) and smiled sweetly as she looked at him. So sweetly, indeed, that poor Jeff felt like the hulking wolf of the old world fable, and hesitated — as that wolf did *not*. The California *faunæ* have possibly depreciated.

"Come here!" she cried, in a small head voice, not unlike a bird's twitter.

Jeff lumbered on clumsily. His high boots had become suddenly very heavy.

"I'm so glad to see you. I've just tired poor mother out — I 'm always tiring people out — and she 's gone back

to the house to write letters. Sit down, Mr. Jeff, do, *please!*"

Jeff, feeling uncomfortably large in Miss Mayfield's presence, painfully seated himself on the edge of a very low stone, which had the effect of bringing his knees up on a level with his chin, and affected an ease glaringly simulated.

"Or lie down, *there*, Mr. Jeff — it is *so* comfortable."

Jeff, with a dreadful conviction that he was crashing down like a falling pine-tree, managed at last to acquire a recumbent position at a respectful distance from the little figure.

"There, is n't it nice?"

"Yes, Miss Mayfield."

"But, perhaps," said Miss Mayfield, now that she had him down, "perhaps you *too* have got something to do. Dear me! I 'm like that naughty boy in the story-book, who went round to all the animals, in turn, asking them to play with him. He could only find the butterfly who had nothing to do. I don't wonder he was disgusted. I hate butterflies."

Love clarifies the intellect! Jeff, astonished at himself, burst out, "Why, look yer, Miss Mayfield, the butterfly on'y hez a day or two to — to — to live and — be happy!"

Miss Mayfield crossed her knees again, and instantly, after the sublime fashion of her sex, scattered his intellect by a swift transition from the abstract to the concrete. "But *you 're* not a butterfly, Mr. Jeff. You 're always doing something. You 've been hunting."

"No-o!" said Jeff, scarlet, as he thought of his gun in pawn at the "Summit."

"But you *do* hunt; I know it."

"How?"

"You shot those quail for me the morning after I came. I heard you go out — early — very early."

"Why, you allowed you slept so well that night, Miss Mayfield."

"Yes; but there's a kind of delicious half-sleep that sick people have sometimes, when they know and are gratefully conscious that other people are doing things for them, and it makes them rest all the sweeter."

There was a dead silence. Jeff, thrilling all over, dared not say anything to dispel his delicious dream. Miss Mayfield, alarmed at his readiness with the butterfly illustration, stopped short. They both looked at the prospect, at the distant "Summit Hotel" — a mere snow-drift on the mountain — at the clear sunlight on the barren plateau, at the bleak, uncompromising "Half-way House," and — said nothing.

"I ought to be very grateful," at last began Miss Mayfield, in quite another voice, and a suggestion that she was now approaching real and profitable conversation, "that I'm so much better. This mountain air has been like balm to me. I feel I am growing stronger day by day. I do not wonder that you are so healthy and so strong as you are, Mr. Jeff."

Jeff, who really did not know before that he was so healthy, apologetically admitted the fact. At the same time, he was miserably conscious that Miss Mayfield's condition, despite her ill health, was very superior to his own.

"A month ago," she continued reflectively, "my mother would never have thought it possible to leave me here alone. Perhaps she may be getting worried now."

Miss Mayfield had calculated over much on Jeff's recumbent position. To her surprise and slight mortification, he rose instantly to his feet, and said anxiously —

"Ef you think so, miss, p'raps I 'm keeping you here."

"Not at all, Mr. Jeff. Your being here is a sufficient excuse for my staying," she replied, with the large dignity of a small body.

Jeff, mentally and physically crushed again, came down a little heavier than before, and reclined humbly at her feet. Second knock-down blow for Miss Mayfield.

"Come, Mr. Jeff," said the triumphant goddess, in her first voice, "tell me something about yourself. How do you live here — I mean, what do you do? You ride, of course — and very well too, I can tell you! But you know *that*. And of course that scarf and the silver spurs and the whole dashing equipage are not intended entirely for yourself. No! Some young woman is made happy by that exhibition, of course. Well, then, there 's the riding down to see her, and perhaps the riding out *with* her, and — what else?"

"Miss Mayfield," said Jeff, suddenly rising above his elbow and his grammar, "thar is n't *no* young woman! Thar is n't another soul except yourself that I 've laid eyes on, or cared to see since I 've been yer. Ef my aunt hez been telling ye that — she 's — she — she — she — she — lies."

Absolute, undiluted truth, even of a complimentary nature, is confounding to most women. Miss Mayfield was no exception to her sex. She first laughed, as she felt she ought to, and properly might with any other man than Jeff; then she got frightened, and said hurriedly, "No, no! you misunderstand me. Your aunt has said nothing." And then she stopped with a pink spot on her cheek-bones. First blood for Jeff!

Now this would never do; it was worse than the butterflies! She rose to her full height — four feet eleven and a half — and drew her cloak over her shoulders. "I think I will return to the house," she said quietly; "I suppose I ought not to overtask my strength."

"You 'd better let me go with you, miss," said Jeff submissively.

"I will, on one condition," she said, recovering her

archness, with a little venom in it, I fear. "You were going home, too, when I called to you. Now, I do not intend to let you leave that bag behind that tree, and then have to come back for it, just because you feel obliged to go with me. Bring it with you on one arm, and I 'll take the other, or else — I 'll go alone. Don't be alarmed," she added softly; "I 'm stronger than I was the first night I came, when you carried me and all my worldly goods besides."

She turned upon him her subtle magnetic eyes, and looked at him as she had the first night they met. Jeff turned away bewildered, but presently appeared again with the bag on his shoulder, and her wrap on his arm. As she slipped her little hand over his sleeve, he began, apologetically and nervously —

"When I said that about Aunt Sally, miss, I" —

The hand immediately became limp, the grasp conventional.

"I was mad, miss," Jeff blundered on, "and I don't see how *you* believed it — knowing everything ez you do."

"How knowing everything as I do?" asked Miss Mayfield coldly.

"Why, about the quail, and about the bag!"

"Oh," said Miss Mayfield.

Five minutes later, Yuba Bill nearly ditched his coach in his utter amazement at an apparently simple spectacle — a tall, good-looking young fellow, in a red shirt and high boots, carrying a bag on his back, and beside him, hanging confidentially on his arm, a small, slight, pretty girl in a red cloak. "Nothing *mean* about *her*, eh, Bill?" said an admiring box-passenger. "Young couple, I reckon, just out from the States."

"No!" roared Bill.

"Oh, well, his sweetheart, I reckon?" suggested the box-passenger.

"Nary time!" growled Bill. "Look yer! I know 'em both, and they knows *me*. Did ye notiss she never drops his arm when she sees the stage comin', but kinder trapes along jist the same? Had they been courtin', she'd hev dropped his arm like pizen, and walked on t' other side the road."

Nevertheless, for some occult reason, Bill was evidently out of humor; and for the next few miles exhorted the impenitent Blue Grass horse with considerable fervor.

Meanwhile this pair, outwardly the picture of pastoral conjugality, slowly descended the hill. In that brief time, failing to get at any further facts regarding Jeff's life, or perhaps reading the story quite plainly, Miss Mayfield had twittered prettily about herself. She painted her tropic life in the Sandwich Islands — her delicious "laziness," as she called it; "for, you know," she added, "although I had the excuse of being an invalid, and of living in the laziest climate in the world, and of having money, I think, Mr. Jeff, that I'm naturally lazy. Perhaps if I lived here long enough, and got well again, I might do something, but I don't think I could ever be like your aunt. And there she is now, Mr. Jeff, making signs for you to hasten. No, don't mind me, but run on ahead; else I shall have *her* blaming me for demoralizing *you* too. Go; I insist upon it! I can walk the rest of the way alone. Will you go? You won't? Then I shall stop here and not stir another step forward until you do."

She stopped, half jestingly, half earnestly, in the middle of the road, and emphasized her determination with a nod of her head — an action that, however, shook her hat first rakishly over one eye, and then on the ground. At which Jeff laughed, picked it up, presented it to her, and then ran off to the house.

III

His aunt met him angrily on the porch. "Thar ye are at last, and yer 's a stranger waitin' to see you. He 's been axin all sorts o' questions about the house and the business, and kinder snoopin' round permiskiss. I don't like his looks, Jeff, but thet 's no reason why *ye* should be gallivantin' round in business hours."

A large, thick-set man, with a mechanical smile that was an overt act of false pretense, was lounging in the bar-room. Jeff dimly remembered to have seen him at the last county election, distributing tickets at the polls. This gave Jeff a slight prejudice against him, but a greater presentiment of some vague evil in the air caused him to motion the stranger to an empty room in the angle of the house behind the bar-room, which was too near the hall through which Miss Mayfield must presently pass.

It was an infelicitous act of precaution, for at that very moment Miss Mayfield slowly passed beneath its open window, and seeing her chair in the sunny angle, dropped into it for rest and possibly meditation. Consequently she overheard every word of the following colloquy.

The Stranger's voice: "Well, now, seein' ez I 've been waitin' for ye over an hour, off and on, and ez my bizness with ye is two words, it strikes me yer puttin' on a little too much style in this yer interview, Mr. Jefferson Briggs."

Jeff's voice (a little husky with restraint): "What is yer business?"

The stranger's voice (lazily): "It 's an at-tachment on this yer property for principal, interest, and costs — one hundred and twelve dollars and seventy-five cents, at the suit of Cyrus Parker."

Jeff's voice (in quick surprise): "Parker? Why, I saw him only yesterday, and he agreed to wait a spell longer."

The Stranger's voice: "Mebbee he did! Mebbee he heard afterwards suthin' about the goin's on up yar. Mebbee he heard suthin' o' property bein' converted into ready cash — sich property ez horses, guns, and sich! Mebbee he heard o' gay and festive doin's — chickin every day, fresh eggs, butcher's meat, port wine, and sich! Mebbee he allowed that his chances o' gettin' his own honest grub outer his debt was lookin' mighty slim! Mebbee" (louder) "he thought he'd ask the man who bought yer horse, and the man you pawned your gun to, what was goin' on! Mebbee he thought he'd like to get a holt a suthin' himself, even if it was only some of that yar chickin and port wine!".

Jeff's voice (earnestly and hastily): "They 're not for me. I have a family boarding here, with a sick daughter. You don't think" —

The Stranger's voice (lazily): "I reckon! I seed you and her pre-ambulating down the hill, lockin' arms. A good deal o' style, Jeff — fancy! expensive! How does Aunt Sally take it?"

A slight shaking of the floor and window — a dead silence.

The Stranger's voice (very faintly): "For God's sake, let me up!"

Jeff's voice (very distinctly): "Another word! raise your voice above a whisper, and by the living G—"

Silence.

The Stranger's voice (gasping): "I — I — promise!"

Jeff's voice (low and desperate): "Get up out of that! Sit down thar! Now hear me! I 'm not resisting your process. If you had all h—ll as witnesses you dare n't say *that*. I 've shut up your foul jaw, and kept it from poisoning the air, and thar 's no law in Californy agin it! Now listen. What! You will, will you?"

Everything quiet; a bird twittering on the window ledge, nothing more.

The Stranger's voice (very huskily): "I cave! Gimme some whiskey."

Jeff's voice: "When we 're through. Now listen! You can take possession of the house; you can stand behind the bar and take every cent that comes in; you can prevent anything going out; but as long as Mr. Mayfield and his family stay here, by the living God — law or no law — I 'll be boss here, and they shall never know it!"

The Stranger's voice (weakly and submissively): "That sounds square. Anythin' not agin the law and in reason, Jeff!"

Jeff's voice: "I mean to be square. Here is all the money I have, ten dollars. Take it for any extra trouble you may have to satisfy me."

A pause — the clinking of coin.

The Stranger's voice (deprecatingly): "Well! I reckon that *would* be about fair. Consider the *trouble*" (a weak laugh here) "just *now*. 'T ain't every man ez hez your grip. He! he! Ef ye had n't took me so suddent like — he! he! — well! — how about that ar whiskey?"

Jeff's voice (coolly): "I 'll bring it."

Steps, silence, coughing, spitting, and throat-clearing from the stranger.

Steps again, and the click of glass.

The Stranger's voice (submissively): "In course I must go back to the Forks and fetch up my duds. Ye know what I mean! Thar now — don't, Mr. Jeff!"

Jeff's voice (sternly): "If I find you go back on me" —

The Stranger's voice (hurriedly): "Thar 's my hand on it. Ye can count on Jim Dodd."

Steps again. Silence. A bird lights on the window ledge, and peers into the room. All is at rest.

. . . . . .

Jeff and the deputy-sheriff walked through the bar-room

and out on the porch. Miss Mayfield in an arm-chair looked up from her book.

"I've written a letter to my father that I'd like to have mailed at the Forks this afternoon," she said, looking from Jeff to the stranger; "perhaps this gentleman will oblige me by taking it, if he 's going that way."

"I'll take it, miss," said Jeff hurriedly.

"No," said Miss Mayfield archly, "I've taken up too much of your time already."

"I'm at your service, miss," said the stranger, considerably affected by the spectacle of this pretty girl, who certainly at that moment, in her bright eyes and slightly pink cheeks, belied the suggestion of ill health.

"Thank you. Dear me!" She was rummaging in a reticule and in her pockets. "Oh, Mr. Jeff!"

"Yes, miss?"

"I'm so frightened!"

"How, miss?"

"I have — yes! — I have left that letter on the stump in the woods, where I was sitting when you came. Would you" —

Jeff darted into the house, seized his hat, and stopped. He was thinking of the stranger.

"Could you be so kind?"

Jeff looked in her agitated face, cast a meaning glance at the stranger, and was off like a shot.

The fire dropped out of Miss Mayfield's eyes and cheeks. She turned toward the stranger.

"Please step this way."

She always hated her own childish treble. But just at that moment she thought she had put force and dignity into it, and was correspondingly satisfied. The deputy-sheriff was equally pleased, and came towards the upright little figure with open admiration.

"Your name is Dodd — James Dodd?"

"Yes, miss."

"You are the deputy-sheriff of the county? Don't look round — there is no one here!"

"Well, miss — if you say so — yes!"

"My father — Mr. Mayfield — understood so. I regret he is not here. I regret still more I could not have seen you before you saw Mr. Briggs, as he wished me to."

"Yes, miss."

"My father is a friend of Mr. Briggs, and knows something of his affairs. There was a debt to a Mr. Parker" (here Miss Mayfield apparently consulted an entry in her tablets) "of one hundred and twelve dollars and seventy-five cents — am I right?"

The deputy, with great respect, "That is the figgers."

"Which he wished to pay without the knowledge of Mr. Briggs, who would not have consented to it."

The official opened his eyes. "Yes, miss."

"Well, as Mr. Mayfield is *not* here, I am here to pay it for him. You can take a check on Wells, Fargo & Co., I suppose?"

"Certainly, miss."

She took a check-book and pen and ink from her reticule, and filled up a check. She handed it to him, and the pen and ink. "You are to give me a receipt."

The deputy looked at the matter-of-fact little figure, and signed and handed over the receipted bill.

"My father said Mr. Briggs was not to know this."

"Certainly not, miss."

"It was Mr. Briggs's intention to let the judgment take its course, and give up the house. You are a man of business, Mr. Dodd, and know that this is ridiculous!"

The deputy laughed. "In course, miss."

"And whatever Mr. Briggs may have proposed to you to do, when you go back to the Forks, you are to write him a letter, and say that you will simply hold the judgment without levy."

"All right, miss," said the deputy, not ill-pleased to hold himself in this superior attitude to Jeff.

"And" —

"Yes, miss?"

She looked steadily at him. "Mr. Briggs told my father that he would pay you ten dollars for the privilege of staying here."

"Yes, miss."

"And of course *that's* not necessary now."

"No-o, miss."

A very small white hand — a mere child's hand — was here extended, palm uppermost.

The official, demoralized completely, looked at it a moment, then went into his pockets and counted out into the palm the coins given by Jeff; they completely filled the tiny receptacle.

Miss Mayfield counted the money gravely, and placed it in her portemonnaie with a snap.

Certain qualities affect certain natures. This practical business act of the diminutive beauty before him — albeit he was just ten dollars out of pocket by it — struck the official into helpless admiration. He hesitated.

"That 's all," said Miss Mayfield coolly; "you need not wait. The letter was only an excuse to get Mr. Briggs out of the way."

"I understand ye, miss." He hesitated still. "Do you reckon to stop in these parts long?"

"I don't know."

"'Cause ye ought to come down some day to the Forks."

"Yes."

"Good morning, miss."

"Good morning."

Yet at the corner of the house the rascal turned and looked back at the little figure in the sunlight. He had just been physically overcome by a younger man — he had

lost ten dollars — he had a wife and three children. He forgot all this. He had been captivated by Miss Mayfield!

That practical heroine sat there five minutes. At the end of that time Jeff came bounding down the hill, his curls damp with perspiration; his fresh, honest face the picture of woe, *her* woe, for the letter could not be found!

"Never mind, Mr. Jeff. I wrote another and gave it to him."

Two tears were standing on her cheeks. Jeff turned white.

"Good God, miss!"

"It 's nothing. You were right, Mr. Jeff! I ought not to have walked down here alone. I 'm very, very tired, and — so — so miserable."

What woman could withstand the anguish of that honest boyish face? I fear Miss Mayfield could, for she looked at him over her handkerchief, and said, "Perhaps you had something to say to your friend, and I 've sent him off."

"Nothing," said Jeff hurriedly; and she saw that all his other troubles had vanished at the sight of her weakness. She rose tremblingly from her seat. "I think I will go in now, but I think — I think — I must ask you to — to — carry me!"

Oh, lame and impotent conclusion!

The next moment, Jeff, pale, strong, passionate, but tender as a mother lifted her in his arms and brought her into the sitting-room. A simultaneous ejaculation broke from Aunt Sally and Mrs. Mayfield — the possible comment of posterity on the whole episode.

"Well, Jeff, I reckoned you 'd be up to suthin' like that!"

"Well, Jessie! I knew you could n't be trusted."

Mr. James Dodd did not return from the Forks that afternoon, to Jeff's vague uneasiness. Towards evening a

messenger brought a note from him, written on the back of a printed legal form, to this effect: —

DEAR SIR, — Seeing as you Intend to act on the Square in regard to that little Mater I have aranged Things so that I ant got to stop with you but I'll drop in onct in a wile to keep up a show for a Drink — respy yours,

J. DODD.

In this latter suggestion our legal Cerberus exhibited all three of his heads at once. One could keep faith with Miss Mayfield, one could see her "onct in a wile," and one could drink at Jeff's expense. Innocent Jeff saw only generosity and kindness in the man he had half-choked, and a sense of remorse and shame almost outweighed the relief of his absence. "He might hev been ugly," said Jeff. He did not know how, in this selfish world, there is very little room for gratuitous, active ugliness.

Miss Mayfield did not leave her room that afternoon. The wind was getting up, and it was growing dark when Jeff, idly sitting on his porch, hoping for her appearance, was quite astounded at the apparition of Yuba Bill as a pedestrian, dusty and thirsty, making for his usual refreshment. Jeff brought out the bottle, but could not refrain from mixing his verbal astonishment with the conventional cocktail. Bill, partaking of his liquor and becoming once more a speaking animal, slowly drew off his heavy, baggy driving-gloves. No one had ever seen Bill without them — he was currently believed to sleep in them — and when he laid them on the counter they still retained the grip of his hand, which gave them an entertaining likeness to two plethoric and over-fed spiders.

"Ef I concluded to pass over my lines to a friend and take a pasear up yer this evening," said Bill, eyeing Jeff sharply, "I don't know ez thar's any law agin it! Onless

yer keepin' a private branch o' the Occidental Ho-tel, and on'y take in fash'n'ble fammerlies!"

Jeff, with a rising color, protested against such a supposition.

"Because ef ye *are*," said Bill, lifting his voice, and crushing one of the overgrown spiders with his fist, "I've got a word or two to say to the son of Joe Briggs of Tuolumne. Yes, sir! Joe Briggs — yer father — ez blew his brains out for want of a man ez could stand up and say a word to him at the right time."

"Bill," said Jeff, in a low, resolute tone — that tone yielded up only from the smitten chords of despair and desperation — "thar's a sick woman in the house. I'll listen to anything you've got to say if you'll say it quietly. But you must and *shall* speak low."

Real men quickly recognize real men the world over; it is only your shams who fence and spar. Bill, taking in the voice of the speaker more than his words, dropped his own.

"I said I had a kepple of words to say to ye. Thar is n't any time in the last fower months — ever since ye took stock in this old shanty, for the matter o' that — that I could n't hev said them to ye. I've knowed all your doin's. I've knowed all your debts, 'spesh'ly that ye owe that sneakin' hound Parker; and thar is n't a time that I could n't and would n't hev chipped in and paid 'em for ye — for your father's sake — ef I'd allowed it to be the square thing for ye. But I know ye, Jeff. I know what 's in your *blood*. I knew your father — allus dreamin', hopin', waitin'; I know *you*, Jeff, dreamin', hopin', waitin' till the end. And I stood by, givin' you a free rein, and let it come!"

Jeff buried his face in his hands.

"It ain't your blame — it's blood! It ain't a week ago ez the kimpany passes me over a hoss. 'Three quarters Morgan,' sez they. Sez I, 'Wot's the other quarter?'

Sez they, 'A Mexican half-breed.' Well, she was a fair sort of hoss. Comin' down Heavytree Hill last trip, we meets a drove o' Spanish steers. In 'course she goes wild directly. Blood!"

Bill raised his glass, softly swirled its contents round and round, tasted it, and set it down.

"The kepple o' words I had to say to ye was this: Git up and git!"

Something like this had passed through Jeff's mind the day before the Mayfields came. Something like it had haunted him once or twice since. He turned quickly upon the speaker.

"Ez how? you sez," said Bill, catching at the look. "I drives up yer some night, and you sez to me, 'Bill, hev you got two seats over to the Divide for me and aunty — out on a pasear.' And I sez, 'I happen to hev one inside and one on the box with me.' And you hands out yer traps and any vallybles ye don't want ter leave, and you puts your aunt inside, and gets up on the box with me. And you sez to me, ez man to man, 'Bill,' sez you, 'might you hev a kepple o' hundred dollars about ye that ye could lend a man ez was leaving the county, dead broke?' and I sez, 'I 've got it, and I know of an op'nin' for such a man in the next county.' And you steps into *that* op'nin', and your creditors — 'spesh'ly Parker — slips into *this*, and in a week they offers to settle with ye ten cents on the dollar."

Jeff started, flushed, trembled, recovered himself, and after a moment said, doggedly, "I can't do it, Bill; I could n't."

"In course," said Bill, putting his hands slowly into his pockets, and stretching his legs out — "in course ye can't because of a woman!"

Jeff turned upon him like a hunted bear. Both men rose, but Bill already had his hand on Jeff's shoulder.

"I reckoned a minute ago there was a sick gal in the

house! Who 's going to make a row now! Who 's going to stamp and tear round, eh?"

Jeff sank back on his chair.

"I said thar was a woman," continued Bill; "thar allus is one! Let a man be hell-bent or heaven-bent, somewhere in his track is a woman's feet. I don't say anythin' agin this gal, ez a gal. The best of 'em, Jeff, is only guide-posts to p'int a fellow on his right road, and only a fool or a drunken man holds on to 'em or leans agin 'em. Allowin' this gal is all you think she is, how far is your guide-post goin' with ye, eh? Is she goin' to leave her father and mother for ye? Is she goin' to give up herself and her easy ways and her sicknesses for ye? Is she willin' to take ye for a perpetooal landlord the rest of her life? And if she is, Jeff, are ye the man to let her? Are ye willin' to run on her errants, to fetch her dinners ez ye do? Thar ez men ez does it; not yer in Californy, but over in the States thar 's fellows is willing to take that situation. I 've heard," continued Bill, in a low, mysterious voice, as of one describing the habits of the Anthropophagi — "I 've heard o' fellows ez call themselves men, sellin' of themselves to rich women in that way. I 've heard o' rich gals buyin' of men for their shape; sometimes — but thet 's in furrin' kintries — for their pedigree! I 've heard o' fellows bein' in that business, and callin' themselves men instead o' hosses! Ye ain't that kind o' man, Jeff. 'T ain't in yer blood. Yer father was a fool about women, and in course they ruined him, as they allus do the best men. It 's on'y the fools and sneaks ez a woman ever makes anythin' out of. When ye hear of a man a woman hez made, ye hears of a nincompoop! And when they does produce 'em in the way o' nater, they ain't responsible for 'em, and sez they 're the image o' their fathers! Ye ain't a man ez is goin' to trust yer fate to a woman!"

"No," said Jeff darkly.

"I reckoned not," said Bill, putting his hands in his pockets again. "Ye might if ye was one o' them kind o' fellows as kem up from 'Frisco with her to Sacramento. One o' them kind o' fellows ez could sling poetry and French and Latin to her — one of *her* kind — but ye ain't! No, sir!"

Unwise William of Yuba! In any other breast but Jeff's that random shot would have awakened the irregular auxiliary of love — jealousy! But Jeff, being at once proud and humble, had neither vanity nor conceit, without which jealousy is impossible. Yet he winced a little, for he had feeling, and then said earnestly, —

"Do you think that opening you spoke of would hold for a day or two longer?"

"I reckon."

"Well, then, I think I can settle up matters here my own way, and go with you, Bill."

He had risen, and yet hesitatingly kept his hand on the back of his chair. "Bill!"

"Jeff!"

"I want to ask you a question; speak up, and don't mind me, but say the truth."

Our crafty Ulysses, believing that he was about to be entrapped, ensconced himself in his pockets, cocked one eye, and said, "Go on, Jeff."

"Was my father *very* bad?"

Bill took his hands from his pockets. "Thar is n't a man ez crawls above his grave ez is worthy to lie in the same ground with him!"

"Thank you, Bill. Good-night; I 'm going to turn in!"

"Look yar, boy! G—d d—n it all, Jeff! what do ye mean?"

There were two tears — twin sisters of those in his sweetheart's eyes that afternoon — now standing in Jeff's!

Bill caught both his hands in his own. Had they been

of the Latin race they would have, right honestly, taken each other in their arms, and perhaps kissed! Being Anglo-Saxons, they gripped each other's hands hard, and one, as above stated, swore!

When Jeff ascended to his room that night, he went directly to his trunk and took out Miss Mayfield's slipper. Alack! during the day Aunt Sally had "put things to rights" in his room, and the trunk had been moved. This had somewhat disordered its contents, and Miss Mayfield's slipper contained a dozen shot from a broken Eley's cartridge, a few quinine pills, four postage stamps, part of a coral earring which Jeff — on the most apocryphal authority — fondly believed belonged to his mother, whom he had never seen, and a small silver school medal which Jeff had once received for "good conduct," much to his own surprise, but which he still religiously kept as evidence of former conventional character. He colored a little, rubbed the medal and earring ruefully on his sleeve, replaced them in his trunk, and then hastily emptied the rest of the slipper's contents on the floor. This done, he drew off his boots, and gliding noiselessly down the stair, hung the slipper on the knob of Miss Mayfield's door, and glided back again without detection.

Rolling himself in his blankets, he lay down on his bed. But not to sleep! Staringly wide awake, he at last felt the lulling of the wind that nightly shook his casement, and listened while the great, rambling, creaking, disjointed "Half-way House" slowly settled itself to repose. He thought of many things; of himself, of his past, of his future, but chiefly, I fear, of the pale proud face now sleeping contentedly in the chamber below him. He tossed with many plans and projects, more or less impracticable, and then began to doze. Whereat the moon, creeping in the window, laid a cold white arm across him, and eventually dried a few foolish tears upon his sleeping lashes.

IV

Aunt Sally was making pies in the kitchen the next morning when Jeff hesitatingly stole upon her. The moment was not a felicitous one. Pie-making was usually an aggressive pursuit with Aunt Sally, entered into severely, and prosecuted unto the bitter end. After watching her a few moments Jeff came up and placed his arms tenderly around her. People very much in love find relief, I am told, in this vicarious expression.

"Aunty."

"Well, Jeff! Thar, now — yer gittin' all dough!" Nevertheless, the hard face relaxed a little. Something of a smile stole round her mouth, showing what she might have been before theology and bitters had supplied the natural feminine longings.

"Aunty dear!"

"You — boy!"

It *was* a boy's face — albeit bearded like the pard, with an extra fierceness in the mustaches — that looked upon hers. She could not help bestowing a grim floury kiss upon it.

"Well, what is it now?"

"I'm thinking, aunty, it's high time you and me packed up our traps and 'shook' this yar shanty, and located somewhere else." Jeff's voice was ostentatiously cheerful, but his eyes were a little anxious.

"What for *now*?"

Jeff hastily recounted his ill luck, and the various reasons — excepting of course the dominant one — for his resolution.

"And when do you kalkilate to go?"

"If you'll look arter things here," hesitated Jeff, "I reckon I'll go up along with Bill to-morrow, and look round a bit."

"And how long do you reckon that gal would stay here after yar gone?"

This was a new and startling idea to Jeff. But in his humility he saw nothing in it to flatter his conceit. Rather the reverse. He colored, and then said apologetically, —

"I thought that you and Jinny could get along without me. The butcher will pack the provisions over from the Fork."

Laying down her rolling-pin, Aunt Sally turned upon Jeff with ostentatious deliberation. "Ye ain't," she began slowly, "ez taking a man with wimmen ez your father was — that 's a fact, Jeff Briggs! They used to say that no woman as he went for could get away from him. But ye don't mean to say yer think yer not good enough — such as ye are — for this snip of an old maid, ez big as a gold dollar, and as yaller?"

"Aunty," said Jeff, dropping his boyish manner, and his color as suddenly, "I 'd rather ye would n't talk that way of Miss Mayfield. Ye don't know her; and there 's times," he added, with a sigh, "ez I reckon ye don't quite know *me* either. That young lady, bein' sick, likes to be looked after. Any one can do that for her. She don't mind who it is. She don't care for me except for that, and," added Jeff humbly, "it 's quite natural."

"I did n't say she did," returned Aunt Sally viciously; "but seeing ez you 've got an empty house yer on yer hands, and me a-slavin' here on jist nothin', if this gal, for the sake o' gallivantin' with ye for a spell, chooses to stay here and keep her family here, and pay high for it, I don't see why it ain't yer duty to Providence and me to take advantage of it."

Jeff raised his eyes to his aunt's face. For the first time it struck him that she might be his father's sister and yet have no blood in her veins that answered to his. There are few shocks more startling and overpowering to original

natures than this sudden sense of loneliness. Jeff could not speak, but remained looking fiercely at her.

Aunt Sally misinterpreted his silence, and returned to her work on the pies. "The gal ain't no fool," she continued, rolling out the crust as if she were laying down broad propositions. "*She* reckons on it too, ez if it was charged in the bill with the board and lodging. Why, did n't she say to me, last night, that she kalkilated afore she went away to bring up some friends from 'Frisco for a few days' visit? and did n't she say, in that pipin', affected v'ice o' hers, 'I oughter make some return for yer kindness and yer nephew's kindness, Aunt Sally, by showing people that can help you, and keep your house full, how pleasant it is up here.' She ain't no fool, with all her faintin's and dyin's away! No, Jeff Briggs. And if she wants to show ye off agin them city fellows ez she knows, and ye ain't got spunk enough to stand up and show off with her — why" — she turned her head impatiently, but he was gone.

If Jeff had ever wavered in his resolution he would have been steady enough *now*. But he had never wavered; the convictions and resolutions of suddenly awakened character are seldom moved by expediency. He was eager to taste the bitter dregs of his cup at once. He began to pack his trunk, and made his preparations for departure. Without avoiding Miss Mayfield in this new excitement, he no longer felt the need of her presence. He had satisfied his feverish anxieties by placing his trunk in the hall beside his open door, and was sitting on his bed, wrestling with a faded and overtasked carpet-bag that would not close and accept his hard conditions, when a small voice from the staircase thrilled him. He walked to the corridor, and, looking down, beheld Miss Mayfield midway on the steps of the staircase.

She had never looked so beautiful before! Jeff had only seen her in those soft enwrappings and half-déshabillé that belong to invalid femininity. Always refined and modest

thus, in her present walking-costume there was added a slight touch of coquettish adornment. There was a brightness of color in her cheek and eye, partly the result of climbing the staircase, partly the result of that audacious impulse that had led her — a modest virgin — to seek a gentleman in this personal fashion. Modesty in a young girl has a comfortable satisfying charm, recognized easily by all humanity; but he must be a sorry knave or a worse prig who is not deliciously thrilled when Modesty puts her charming little foot just over the threshold of Propriety.

"The mountain would not come to Mohammed, so Mohammed must come to the mountain," said Miss Mayfield. "Mother is asleep, Aunt Sally is at work in the kitchen, and here am I, already dressed for a ramble in this bright afternoon sunshine, and no one to go with me. But, perhaps, you, too, are busy?"

"No, miss. I will be with you in a moment."

I wish I could say that he went back to calm his pulses, which the dangerous music of Miss Mayfield's voice had set to throbbing, by a few moments' calm and dispassionate reflection. But he only returned to brush his curls out of his eyes and ears, and to button over his blue flannel shirt a white linen collar, which he thought might better harmonize with Miss Mayfield's attire.

She was sitting on the staircase, poking her parasol through the balusters. "You need not have taken that trouble, Mr. Jeff," she said pleasantly. "*You* are a part of this mountain picture at all times; but *I* am obliged to think of dress."

"It was no trouble, miss."

Something in the tone of his voice made her look in his face as she rose. It was a trifle paler, and a little older. The result, doubtless, thought Miss Mayfield, of his yesterday's experience with the deputy-sheriff. Such was her rapid deduction. Nevertheless, after the fashion of her

sex, she immediately began to argue from quite another hypothesis.

"You are angry with me, Mr. Jeff."

"What, I — Miss Mayfield?"

"Yes, you!"

"Miss Mayfield!"

"Oh yes, you are. Don't deny it?"

"Upon my soul" —

"Yes! You give me punishments and — penances!"

Jeff opened his blue eyes on his tormentor. Could Aunt Sally have been saying anything?

"If anybody, Miss Mayfield" — he began.

"Nobody but you. Look here!"

She extended her little hand with a smile. In the centre of her palm lay four shining double B *shot*.

"There! I found those in my slipper this morning!"

Jeff was speechless.

"Of course *you* did it! Of course it was *you* who found my slipper!" said Miss Mayfield, laughing. "But why did you put shot in it, Mr. Jeff? In some Catholic countries, when people have done wrong, the priests make them do penance by walking with peas in their shoes! What have I ever done to you? And why *shot?* They 're ever so much harder than peas."

Seeing only the mischievous, laughing face before him, and the open palm containing the damning evidence of the broken Eley's cartridge, Jeff stammered out the truth.

"I found the slipper in the bear-skin, Miss Mayfield. I put it in my trunk to keep, thinking yer would n't miss it, and it 's being a kind of remembrance after you 're gone away — of — of the night you came here. Somebody moved the trunk in my room," and he hung his head here. "The things inside all got mixed up."

"And that made you change your mind about keeping it?" said Miss Mayfield, still smiling.

"No, miss."

"What was it, then?"

"I gave it back to you, Miss Mayfield, because *I* was going away."

"Indeed! Where?"

"I 'm going to find another location. Maybe you 've noticed," he continued, falling back into his old apologetic manner in spite of his pride of resolution — "maybe you 've noticed that this place here has no advantages for a hotel."

"I had not, indeed. I have been very comfortable."

"Thank you, miss."

"When do you go?"

"To-night."

For all his pride and fixed purpose he could not help looking eagerly in her face. Miss Mayfield's eyes met his pleasantly and quietly.

"I 'm sorry to part with you so soon," she said, as she stepped back a pace or two with folded hands. "Of course every moment of your time now is occupied. You must not think of wasting it on me."

But Jeff had recovered his sad composure. "I 'd like to go with you, Miss Mayfield. It 's the last time, you know," he added simply.

Miss Mayfield did not reply. It was a tacit assent, however, although she moved somewhat stiffly at his side as they walked towards the door. Quite convinced that Jeff's resolution came from his pecuniary troubles, Miss Mayfield was wondering if she had not better assure him of his security from further annoyance from Dodd. Wonderful complexity of female intellect! she was a little hurt at his ingratitude to her for a kindness he could not possibly have known. Miss Mayfield felt that in some way she was unjustly treated. How many of our miserable sex, incapable of divination, have been crushed under that unreasonable feminine reproof, "You ought to have known!"

The afternoon sun was indeed shining brightly as they stepped out before the bleak angle of the "Half-way House;" but it failed to mitigate the habitually practical austerity of the mountain breeze — a fact which Miss Mayfield had never before noticed. The house was certainly bleak and exposed; the site by no means a poetical one. She wondered if she had not put a romance into it, and perhaps even into the man beside her, which did not belong to either. It was a moment of dangerous doubt.

"I don't know but that you 're right, Mr. Jeff," she said finally, as they faced the hill, and began the ascent together. "This place is a little queer, and bleak, and — unattractive."

"Yes, miss," said Jeff, with direct simplicity, "I 've always wondered what you saw in it to make you content to stay, when it would be so much prettier, and more suitable for you at the 'Summit.'"

Miss Mayfield bit her lip, and was silent. After a few moments' climbing she said, almost pettishly, "Where is this famous 'Summit'?"

Jeff stopped. They had reached the top of the hill. He pointed across an olive-green chasm to a higher level, where, basking in the declining sun, clustered the long rambling outbuildings around the white blinking façade of the "Summit House." Framed in pines and hemlocks, tender with soft gray shadows, and nestling beyond a foreground of cultivated slope, it was a charming rustic picture.

Miss Mayfield's quick eye took in its details. Her quick intellect took in something else. She had seated herself on the road-bank, and clasping her knees between her locked fingers, she suddenly looked up at Jeff. "What possessed you to come half-way up a mountain, instead of going on to the top?"

"Poverty, miss!"

Miss Mayfield flushed a little at this practical direct answer to her half-figurative question. However, she began to think that moral Alpine-climbing youth might have pecuniary restrictions in their high ambitions, and that the hero of "Excelsior" might have succumbed to more powerful opposition than the wisdom of Age or the blandishments of Beauty.

"You mean that poverty up there is more expensive?"

"Yes, miss."

"But you would like to live there?"

"Yes."

They were both silent. Miss Mayfield glanced at Jeff under the corners of her lashes. He was leaning against a tree, absorbed in thought. Accustomed to look upon him as a pleasing picturesque object, quite fresh, original, and characteristic, she was somewhat disturbed to find that to-day he presented certain other qualities which clearly did not agree with her preconceived ideas of his condition. He had abandoned his usual large top-boots for low shoes, and she could not help noticing that his feet were small and slender as were his hands, albeit browned by exposure. His ruddy color was gone too, and his face, pale with sorrow and experience, had a new expression. His buttoned-up coat and white collar, so unlike his usual self, also had its suggestions — which Miss Mayfield was at first inclined to resent. Women are quick to notice and augur more or less wisely from these small details. Nevertheless, she began in quite another tone.

"Do you remember your mother — *Mr.* — *Mr.* — *Briggs?*"

Jeff noticed the new epithet, "No, miss; she died when I was quite young."

"Your father, then?"

Jeff's eye kindled a little, aggressively. "I remember *him.*"

"What was he?"

"Miss Mayfield!"

"What was his business or profession?"

"He — had n't — any!"

"Oh, I see — a gentleman of property."

Jeff hesitated, looked at Miss Mayfield hurriedly, colored, and did not reply.

"And lost his property, Mr. Briggs?"

With one of those rare impulses of an overtasked gentle nature, Jeff turned upon her almost savagely. "My father was a gambler, and shot himself at a gambling-table."

Miss Mayfield rose hurriedly. "I — I — beg your pardon, Mr. Jeff."

Jeff was silent.

"You know — you *must* know — I did not mean" —

No reply.

"Mr. Jeff!"

Her little hand fluttered toward him, and lit upon his sleeve, where it was suddenly captured and pressed passionately to his lips.

"I did not mean to be thoughtless or unkind," said Miss Mayfield, discreetly keeping to the point, and trying weakly to disengage her hand. "You know I would n't hurt your feelings."

"I know, Miss Mayfield." (Another kiss.)

"I was ignorant of your history."

"Yes, miss." (A kiss.)

"And if I could do anything for you, Mr. Jeff" — She stopped.

It was a very trying position. Being small, she was drawn after her hand quite up to Jeff's shoulder, while he, assenting in monosyllables, was parting the fingers, and kissing them separately. Reasonable discourse in this attitude was out of the question. She had recourse to strategy.

"Oh!"

"Miss Mayfield!"

"You hurt my hand."

Jeff dropped it instantly. Miss Mayfield put it in the pocket of her sacque for security. Besides, it had been so bekissed that it seemed unpleasantly conscious.

"I wish you would tell me all about yourself," she went on, with a certain charming feminine submission of manner quite unlike her ordinary speech; "I should like to help you. Perhaps I can. You know I am quite independent; I mean" —

She paused, for Jeff's face betrayed no signs of sympathetic following.

"I mean I am what people call rich in my own right. I can do as I please with my own. If any of your trouble, Mr. Jeff, arises from want of money, or capital; if any consideration of that kind takes you away from your home; if I could save you *that trouble*, and find for you — perhaps a little nearer — that which you are seeking, I would be *so* glad to do it. You will find the world very wide, and very cold, Mr. Jeff," she continued, with a certain air of practical superiority quite natural to her, but explicable to her friends and acquaintances only as the consciousness of pecuniary independence; "and I wish you would be frank with me. Although I am a woman, I know something of business."

"I will be frank with you, miss," said Jeff, turning a colorless face upon her. "If you was ez rich as the Bank of California, and could throw your money on any fancy or whim that struck you at the moment; if you felt you could buy up any man and woman in California that was willing to be bought up; and if me and my aunt were starving in the road, we would n't touch the money that we had n't earned fairly, and did n't belong to us. No, miss, I ain't that sort o' man!"

How much of this speech, in its brusqueness and slang, was an echo of Yuba Bill's teaching, how much of it was a part of Jeff's inward weakness, I cannot say. He saw Miss Mayfield recoil from him. It added to his bitterness that his thought, for the first time voiced, appeared to him by no means as effective or powerful as he had imagined it would be, but he could not recede from it; and there was the relief that the worst had come, and was over now.

Miss Mayfield took her hand out of her pocket. "I don't think you quite understand me, Mr. Jeff," she said quietly; "and I *hope* I don't understand you." She walked stiffly at his side for a few moments, but finally took the other side of the road. They had both turned, half unconsciously, back again to the "Half-way House."

Jeff felt, like all quarrel-seekers, righteous or unrighteous, the full burden of the fight. If he could have relieved his mind, and at the next moment leaped upon Yuba Bill's coach, and so passed away — without a further word of explanation — all would have been well. But to walk back with this girl, whom he had just shaken off, and who must now thoroughly hate him, was something he had not preconceived, in that delightful forecast of the imagination, when we determine what *we* shall say and do without the least consideration of what may be said or done to us in return. No quarrel proceeds exactly as we expect; people have such a way of behaving illogically! And here was Miss Mayfield, who was clearly derelect, and who should have acted under that conviction, walking along on the other side of the road, trailing the splendor of her parasol in the dust like an offended goddess.

They had almost reached the house. "At what time do you go, Mr. Briggs?" asked the young lady quietly.

"At eleven to-night, by the up stage."

"I expect some friends by that stage — coming with my father."

"My aunt will take good care of them," said Jeff, a little bitterly.

"I have no doubt," responded Miss Mayfield gravely; "but I was not thinking of that. I had hoped to introduce them to you to-morrow. But I shall not be up so late to-night. And I had better say good-by to you now."

She extended the unkissed hand. Jeff took it, but presently let the limp fingers fall through his own.

"I wish you good fortune, Mr. Briggs."

She made a grave little bow, and vanished into the house. But here, I regret to say, her lady-like calm also vanished. She upbraided her mother peevishly for obliging her to seek the escort of Mr. Briggs in her necessary exercise, and flung herself with an injured air upon the sofa.

"But I thought you liked this Mr. Briggs. He seems an accommodating sort of person."

"Very accommodating. Going away just as we are expecting company!"

"Going away?" said Mrs. Mayfield in alarm. "Surely he must be told that we expect some preparation for our friends?"

"Oh," said Miss Mayfield quickly, "his aunt will arrange *that*."

Mrs. Mayfield, habitually mystified at her daughter's moods, said no more. She, however, fulfilled her duty conscientiously by rising, throwing a wrap over the young girl, tucking it in at her feet, and having, as it were, drawn a charitable veil over her peculiarities, left her alone.

At half past ten the coach dashed up to the "Half-way House," with a flash of lights and a burst of cheery voices. Jeff, coming upon the porch, was met by Mr. Mayfield, accompanying a lady and two gentlemen, — evidently the guests alluded to by his daughter. Accustomed as Jeff had become to Mr. Mayfield's patronizing superiority, it

seemed unbearable now, and the easy indifference of the guests to his own presence touched him with a new bitterness. Here were *her* friends, who were to take his place. It was a relief to grasp Yuba Bill's large hand and stand with him alone beside the bar.

"I'm ready to go with you to-night, Bill," said Jeff, after a pause.

Bill put down his glass — a sign of absorbing interest.

"And these yar strangers I fetched?"

"Aunty will take care of them. I've fixed everything."

Bill laid both his powerful hands on Jeff's shoulders, backed him against the wall, and surveyed him with great gravity.

"Briggs's son clar through! A little off color, but the grit all thar! Bully for you, Jeff." He wrung Jeff's hand between his own.

"Bill!" said Jeff hesitatingly.

"Jeff!"

"You would n't mind my getting up on the box *now*, before all the folks get round?"

"I reckon not. Thar's the box-seat all ready for ye."

Climbing to his high perch, Jeff, indistinguishable in the darkness, looked out upon the porch and the moving figures of the passengers, on Bill growling out his orders to his active hostler, and on the twinkling lights of the hotel windows. In the mystery of the night and the bitterness of his heart, everything looked strange. There was a light in Miss Mayfield's room, but the curtains were drawn. Once he thought they moved, but then, fearful of the fascination of watching them, he turned his face resolutely away.

Then, to his relief, the hour came; the passengers reentered the coach; Bill had mounted the box, and was slowly gathering his reins, when a shrill voice rose from the porch.

"Oh, Jeff!"

Jeff leaned an anxious face out over the coach lamps.

It was Aunt Sally, breathless and on tiptoe, reaching with a letter. "Suthin' you forgot!" Then, in a hoarse stage whisper, perfectly audible to every one: "From *her!*"

Jeff seized the letter with a burning face. The whip snapped, and the stage plunged forward into the darkness. Presently Yuba Bill reached down, coolly detached one of the coach lamps, and handed it to Jeff without a word.

Jeff tore open the envelope. It contained Cyrus Parker's bill receipted, and the writ. Another small inclosure contained ten dollars, and a few lines written in pencil in a large masculine business hand. By the light of the lamp Jeff read as follows: —

I hope you will forgive me for having tried to help you even in this accidental way, before I knew how strong were your objections to help from me. Nobody knows this but myself. Even Mr. Dodd thinks my father advanced the money. The ten dollars the rascal would have kept, but I made him disgorge it. I did it all while you were looking for the letter in the woods. Pray forget all about it, and any pain you may have had from J. M.

Frank and practical as this letter appeared to be, and, doubtless, as it was intended to be by its writer, the reader will not fail to notice that Miss Mayfield said nothing of having overheard Jeff's quarrel with the deputy, and left him to infer that that functionary had betrayed him. It was simply one of those unpleasant details not affecting the result, usually overlooked in feminine ethics.

For a moment Jeff sat pale and dumb, crushed under the ruins of his pride and self-love. For a moment he hated Miss Mayfield, small and triumphant! How she must have

inwardly laughed at his speech that morning! With what refined cruelty she had saved this evidence of his humiliation, to work her vengeance on him now. He could not stand it! He could not live under it! He would go back and sell the house — his clothes — everything — to pay this wicked, heartless, cruel girl, that was killing — yes, killing —

A strong hand took the swinging-lantern from his unsteady fingers, a strong hand possessed itself of the papers and Miss Mayfield's note, a strong arm was drawn around him, — for his figure was swaying to and fro, his head was giddy, and his hat had fallen off, — and a strong voice, albeit a little husky, whispered in his ear, —

"Easy, boy! easy on the down grade. It'll be all one in a minit."

Jeff tried to comprehend him, but his brain was whirling.

"Pull yourself together, Jeff!" said Bill, after a pause. "Thar! Look yar!" he said suddenly. "*Do you think you can drive* SIX?"

The words recalled Jeff to his senses. Bill laid the six reins in his hands. A sense of life, of activity, of *power*, came back to the young man, as his fingers closed deliciously on the far-reaching, thrilling, living leathern sinews that controlled the six horses, and seemed to be instinct and magnetic with their bounding life. Jeff, leaning back against them, felt the strong youthful tide rush back to his heart, and was himself again. Bill, meantime, took the lamp, examined the papers, and read Miss Mayfield's note. A grim smile stole over his face. After a pause, he said again, "Give Blue Grass her head, Jeff. D—n it, she ain't Miss Mayfield!"

Jeff relaxed the muscles of his wrists, so as to throw the thumb and forefingers a trifle forward. This simple action relieved Blue Grass, alias Miss Mayfield, and made the

coach steadier and less jerky. Wonderful co-relation of forces.

"Thar!" said Yuba Bill, quietly putting the coach lamp back in its place; "you're better already. Thar's nothing like six horses to draw a woman out of a man. I've knowed a case where it took eight mustangs, but it was a mulatter from New Orleans, and they are pizen! Ye might hit up a little on the Pinto hoss — he ain't harmin' ye. So! Now, Jeff, take your time, and take it easy, and what's all this yer about?"

To control six fiery mustangs, and at the same time give picturesque and affecting exposition of the subtle struggles of Love and Pride, was a performance beyond Jeff's powers. He had recourse to an angry staccato, which somehow seemed to him as ineffective as his previous discourse to Miss Mayfield; he was a little incoherent, and perhaps mixed his impressions with his facts, but he nevertheless managed to convey to Bill some general idea of the events of the past three days.

"And she sent ye off after that letter, that was n't thar, while she fixed things up with Dodd?"

"Yes," said Jeff furiously.

"Ye need n't bully the Pinto colt, Jeff; he is doin' his level best. And she snaked that ar ten dollars outer Dodd?"

"Yes; and sent it back to *me*. To ME, Bill! At such a time as this! As if I was dead broke! — a mere tramp. As if" —

"In course! in course!" said Bill soothingly, yet turning his head aside to bestow a deceitful smile upon the trees that whirled beside him. "And ye told her ye did n't want her money?"

"Yes, Bill — but it — it — it was *after* she had done this!"

"Surely! I'll take the lines now, Jeff."

He took them. Jeff relapsed into gloomy silence. The starlight of that dewless Sierran night was bright and cold and passionless. There was no moon to lead the fancy astray with its faint mysteries and suggestions; nothing but a clear, grayish-blue twilight, with sharply silhouetted shadows, pointed here and there with bright large-spaced constant stars. The deep breath of the pine-woods, the faint, cool resinous spices of bay and laurel, at last brought surcease to his wounded spirit. The blessed weariness of exhausted youth stole tenderly on him. His head nodded, dropped. Yuba Bill, with a grim smile, drew him to his side, enveloped him in his blanket, and felt his head at last sink upon his own broad shoulder.

A few minutes later the coach drew up at the "Summit House." Yuba Bill did not dismount, an unusual and disturbing circumstance that brought the bar-keeper to the veranda.

"What's up, old man?"

"I am."

"Sworn off your reg'lar pizen?"

"My physician," said Bill gravely, "hez ordered me dry champagne every three hours."

Nevertheless, the bar-keeper lingered.

"Who 's that you 're dry-nussin' up there?"

I regret that I may not give Yuba Bill's literal reply. It suggested a form of inquiry at once distant, indirect, outrageous, and impossible.

The bar-keeper flashed a lantern upon Jeff's curls and his drooping eyelashes and mustaches.

"It 's that son o' Briggs o' Tuolumne — pooty boy, ain't he?"

Bill disdained a reply.

"Played himself out down there, I reckon. Left his rifle here in pawn."

"Young man," said Bill gravely.

"Old man."

"Ef you 're looking for a safe investment ez will pay ye better than forty-rod whiskey at two bits a glass, jist you hang onter that ar rifle. It may make your fortin yet, or save ye from a drunkard's grave." With this ungracious pleasantry he hurried his dilatory passengers back into the coach, cracked his whip, and was again upon the road. The lights of the "Summit House" presently dropped here and there into the wasting shadows of the trees. Another stretch through the close-set ranks of pines, another dash through the opening, another whirl and rattle by overhanging rocks, and the vehicle was swiftly descending. Bill put his foot on the brake, threw his reins loosely on the necks of his cattle, and looked leisurely back. The great mountain was slowly and steadily rising between them and the valley they quitted.

And at that same moment Miss Mayfield had crept from her bed, and, with a shawl around her pretty little figure, was pressing her eyes against a blank window of the "Half-way House," and wondering where *he* was now.

V

The "opening" suggested by Bill was not a fortunate one. Possibly views of business openings in the public-house line taken from the tops of stage-coaches are not as judicious as those taken from less exalted levels. Certain it is that the "good-will" of the "Lone Star House" promised little more pecuniary value than a conventional blessing. It was in an older and more thickly settled locality than the "Half-way House;" indeed, it was but half a mile away from Campville, famous in '49 — a place with a history and a disaster. But young communities are impatient of settlements that through any accident fail to fulfill the extravagant promise of their youth, and the

wounded hamlet of Campville had crept into the woods and died. The "Lone Star House" was an attempt to woo the passing travelers from another point; but its road led to Campville, and was already touched by its dry-rot. Bill, who honestly conceived that the infusion of fresh young blood like Jeff's into the stagnant current would quicken it, had to confess his disappointment. "I thought ye could put some go into the shanty, Jeff," said Bill, "and make it lively and invitin'!" But the lack of vitality was not in the landlord, but in the guests. The regular customers were disappointed, vacant, hopeless men, who gathered listlessly on the veranda, and talked vaguely of the past. Their hollow-eyed, feeble impotency affected the stranger, even as it checked all ambition among themselves. Do what Jeff might, the habits of the locality were stronger than his individuality; the dead ghosts of the past Campville held their property by invisible mortmain.

In the midst of this struggle the "Half-way House" was sold. Spite of Bill's prediction, the proceeds barely paid Jeff's debts. Aunt Sally prevented any troublesome consideration of *her* future, by applying a small surplus of profit to the expenses of a journey back to her relatives in Kentucky. She wrote Jeff a letter of cheerless instruction, reminded him of the fulfillment of her worst prophecies regarding him, but begged him, in her absence, to rely solely upon the "Word." "For the sperrit killeth," she added vaguely. Whether this referred figuratively to Jeff's business, he did not stop to consider. He was more interested in the information that the Mayfields had removed to the "Summit Hotel" two days after he had left. "She allowed it was for her health's sake," continued Aunt Sally, "but I reckon it 's another name for one of them city fellers who j'ined their party and is keepin' company with her now. They talk o' property and stocks and sich worldly trifles all the time, and it 's easy to see their idees is set together. It 's

allowed at the Forks that Mr. Mayfield paid Parker's bill for you. I said it was n't so, fur ye 'd hev told me; but if it is so, Jeff, and ye did n't tell me, it was for only one puppos, and that wos that Mayfield bribed ye to break off with his darter! That was *why* you went off so suddent, 'like a thief in the night,' and why Miss Mayfield never let on a word about you after you left — not even your name!"

Jeff crushed the letter between his fingers, and going behind the bar, poured out half a glass of stimulant and drank it. It was not the first time since he came to the "Lone Star House" that he had found this easy relief from his present thought; it was not the first time that he had found this dangerous ally of sure and swift service in bringing him up or down to that level of his dreary, sodden guests, so necessary to his trade. Jeff had not the excuse of the inborn drunkard's taste. He was impulsive and extreme. At the end of the four weeks he came out on the porch one night as Bill drew up. "You must take me from this place to-night," he said, in a broken voice scarce like his own. "When we 're on the road we can arrange matters, but I must go to-night."

"But where?" asked Bill.

"Anywhere! Only I must go from here. I shall go if I have to walk."

Bill looked hard at the young man. His face was flushed, his eyes blood-shot, and his hands trembled, not with excitement, but with a vacant, purposeless impotence. Bill looked a little relieved. "You 've been drinking too hard. Jeff, I thought better of ye than that!"

"I think better of *myself* than that," said Jeff, with a certain wild, half-hysterical laugh, "and that is why I want to go. Don't be alarmed, Bill," he added; "I have strength enough to save myself, and I shall! But it is n't worth the struggle *here*."

He left the "Lone Star House" that night. He would,

he said to Bill, go on to Sacramento, and try to get a situation as clerk or porter there; he was too old to learn a trade. He said little more. When, after forty-eight hours' inability to eat, drink, or sleep, Bill, looking at his haggard face and staring eyes, pressed him to partake, medicinally, from a certain black bottle, Jeff gently put it aside, and saying, with a sad smile, "I can get along without it; I 've gone through more than this," left his mentor in a state of mingled admiration and perplexity.

At Sacramento he found a commercial "opening." But certain habits of personal independence, combined with a direct truthfulness and simplicity, were not conducive to business advancement. He was frank, and in his habits impulsive and selfishly outspoken. His employer, a good-natured man, successful in his way, anxious to serve his own interest and Jeff's equally, strove and labored with him, but in vain. His employer's wife, a still more good-natured woman, successful in her way, and equally anxious to serve Jeff's interests and her own, also strove with him as unsuccessfully. At the end of a month he discharged his employer, after a simple, boyish, utterly unbusiness-like interview, and secretly tore up the wife's letter. "I don't know what to make of that chap," said the husband to his wife; "he's about as civilized as an Injun." "And as conceited," added the lady.

Howbeit he took his conceit, his sorrows, his curls, mustaches, broad shoulders, and fifty dollars into humble lodgings in a back street. The days succeeding this were the most restful he had passed since he left the "Half-way House." To wander through the town, half conscious of its strangeness and novel bustling life, and to dream of a higher and nobler future with Miss Mayfield — to feel no responsibility but that of waiting — was, I regret to say, a pleasure to him. He made no acquaintances except among the poorer people and the children. He was sometimes

hungry, he was always poorly clad, but these facts carried no degradation with them now. He read much, and in his way — Jeff's way — tried to improve his mind; his recent commercial experience had shown him various infelicities in his speech and accent. He learned to correct certain provincialisms. He was conscious that Miss Mayfield must have noticed them, yet his odd irrational pride kept him from ever regretting them, if they had offered a possible excuse for her treatment of him.

On one of these nights his steps chanced to lead him into a gambling-saloon. The place had offered no temptation to him; his dealings with the goddess Chance had been of less active nature. Nevertheless he placed his last five dollars on the turn of a card. He won. He won repeatedly; his gains had reached a considerable sum when, flushed, excited, and absorbed, he was suddenly conscious that he had become the centre of observation at the table. Looking up, he saw that the dealer had paused, and, with the cards in his motionless fingers, was gazing at him with fixed eyes and a white face.

Jeff rose and passed hurriedly to his side. "What's the matter?"

The gambler shrunk slightly as he approached. "What's your name?"

"Briggs."

"God! I knew it! How much have you got there?" he continued, in a quick whisper, pointing to Jeff's winnings.

"Five hundred dollars."

"I'll give you double if you'll get up and quit the board!"

"Why?" asked Jeff haughtily.

"Why?" repeated the man fiercely; "why? Well, your father shot himself thar, where you're sittin', at this table;" and he added, with a half-forced, half-hysterical laugh, "*he's playin' at me over your shoulders!*"

Jeff lifted a face as colorless as the gambler's own, went back to his seat, and placed his entire gains on a single card. The gambler looked at him nervously, but dealt. There was a pause, a slight movement where Jeff stood, and then a simultaneous cry from the players as they turned towards him. But his seat was vacant. "Run after him! Call him back! *He 's won again!*" But he had vanished utterly.

How he left, or what indeed followed, he never clearly remembered. His movements must have been automatic, for when, two hours later, he found himself at the "Pioneer" coach office, with his carpet-bag and blankets by his side, he could not recall how or why he had come! He had a dumb impression that he had barely escaped some dire calamity, — rather that he had only temporarily averted it, — and that he was still in the shadow of some impending catastrophe of destiny. He must go somewhere, he must do something to be saved! He had no money, he had no friends; even Yuba Bill had been transferred to another route, miles away. Yet, in the midst of this stupefaction, it was a part of his strange mental condition that trivial details of Miss Mayfield 's face and figure, and even apparel, were constantly before him, to the exclusion of consecutive thought. A collar she used to wear, a ribbon she had once tied around her waist, a blue vein in her dropped eyelid, a curve in her soft, full, bird-like throat, the arch of her instep in her small boots — all these were plainer to him than the future, or even the present. But a voice in his ear, a figure before his abstracted eyes, at last broke upon his reverie.

"Jeff Briggs!"

Jeff mechanically took the outstretched hand of a young clerk of the Pioneer Coach Company, who had once accompanied Yuba Bill and stopped at the "Half-way House." He endeavored to collect his thoughts; here seemed to be an opportunity to go somewhere!

"What are you doing now?" said the young man briskly.

"Nothing," said Jeff simply.

"Oh, I see — going home!"

Home! the word stung sharply through Jeff's benumbed consciousness.

"No," he stammered, "that is" —

"Look here, Jeff," broke in the young man, "I 've got a chance for you that don't fall in a man's way every day. Wells, Fargo & Co.'s treasure messenger from Robinson's Ferry to Mempheys has slipped out. The place is vacant. I reckon I can get it for you."

"When?"

"Now — to-night."

"I 'm ready."

"Come, then."

In ten minutes they were in the company's office, where its manager, a man famous in those days for his boldness and shrewdness, still lingered in the dispatch of business.

The young clerk briefly but deferentially stated certain facts. A few questions and answers followed, of which Jeff heard only the words "Tuolumne" and "Yuba Bill."

"Sit down, Mr. Briggs. Good-night, Roberts."

The young clerk, with an encouraging smile to Jeff, bowed himself out as the manager seated himself at his desk and began to write.

"You know the country pretty well between the Fork and the Summit, Mr. Briggs?" he said, without looking up.

"I lived there," said Jeff.

"That was some months ago, was n't it?"

"Six months," said Jeff, with a sigh.

"It 's changed for the worse since your house was shut up. There 's a long stretch of unsettled country infested by bad characters."

Jeff sat silent.

"Briggs."

"Sir?"

"The last man but one who preceded you was shot by road agents." [1]

"Yes, sir."

"We lost sixty thousand dollars up there."

"Yes?"

"Your father was Briggs of Tuolumne?"

"Yes, sir." Jeff's head dropped, but, glancing shyly up, he saw a pleasant smile on his questioner's face. He was still writing rapidly, but was apparently enjoying at the same time some pleasant recollection.

"Your father and I lost nearly sixty thousand dollars together one night, ten years ago, when we were both younger."

"Yes, sir," said Jeff dubiously.

"But it was *our own money*, Jeff."

"Yes, sir."

"Here's your appointment," he said briefly, throwing away his pen, folding what he had written, and handing it to Jeff. It was the first time that he had looked at him since he entered. He now held out his hand, grasped Jeff's, and said, "Good-night!"

VI

It was late the next evening when Jeff drew up at the coach office at Robinson's Ferry, where he was to await the coming of the Summit coach. His mind, lifted only temporarily out of its benumbed condition during his interview with the manager, again fell back into its dull abstraction. Fully embarked upon his dangerous journey, accepting all the meaning of the trust imposed upon him, he was yet vaguely conscious that he did not realize its full importance. He had neither the dread nor the stimulation

[1] Highway robbers.

of coming danger. He had faced death before in the boyish confidence of animal spirits; his pulse now was scarcely stirred with anticipation. Once or twice before, in the extravagance of his passion, he had imagined himself rescuing Miss Mayfield from danger, or even dying for her. During his journey his mind had dwelt fully and minutely on every detail of their brief acquaintance; she was continually before him, the tones of her voice were in his ears, the suggestive touch of her fingers, the thrill that his lips had felt when he kissed them — all were with him now, but only as a memory. In his coming fate, in his future life, he saw her not. He believed it was a premonition of coming death.

He made a few preparations. The company's agent had told him that the treasure, letters, and dispatches, which had accumulated to a considerable amount, would be handed to him on the box; and that the arms and ammunition were in the boot. A less courageous and determined man might have been affected by the cold, practical brutality of certain advice and instructions offered him by the agent, but Jeff recognized this compliment to his determination, even before the agent concluded his speech by saying, "But I reckon they knew what they were about in the lower office when they sent *you* up. I dare say you kin give me p'ints, ef ye cared to, for all ye 're soft spoken. There are only four passengers booked through; we hev to be a little partikler, suspectin' spies! Two of the four ye kin depend upon to get the top o' their d—d heads blowed off the first fire," he added grimly.

At ten o'clock the Summit coach flashed, rattled, glittered, and snapped, like a disorganized firework, up to the door of the company's office. A familiar figure, but more than usually truculent and aggressive, slowly descended with violent oaths from the box. Without seeing Jeff, it strode into the office.

"Now then," said Yuba Bill, addressing the agent, "whar's that God-forsaken fool that Wells, Fargo & Co. hev sent up yar to take charge o' their treasure? Because I'd like to introduce him to the champion idgit of Calaveras County, that's been selected to go to h—ll with him; and that's me Yuba Bill! P'int him out. Don't keep me waitin'!"

The agent grinned and pointed to Jeff.

Both men recoiled in astonishment. Yuba Bill was the first to recover his speech.

"It's a lie!" he roared; "or somebody has been putting up a job on ye, Jeff! Because I've been twenty years in the service, and am such a nat'ral born mule that when the company strokes my back and sez, 'You're the on'y mule we kin trust, Bill,' I starts up and goes out as a blasted wooden figgerhead for road agents to lay fur and practice on, it don't follow that *you 've* any call to go."

"It was my own seeking, Bill," said Jeff, with one of his old, sweet, boyish smiles. "I did n't know *you* were to drive. But you 're not going back on me now, Bill, are you? you're not going to send me off with another volunteer?"

"That be d—d!" growled Bill. Nevertheless, for ten minutes he reviled the Pioneer Coach Company with picturesque imprecation, tendered his resignation repeatedly to the agent, and at the end of that time, as everybody expected, mounted the box, and with a final malediction, involving the whole settlement, was off.

On the road, Jeff, in a few hurried sentences, told his story. Bill scarcely seemed to listen. "Look yar, Jeff," he said suddenly.

"Yes, Bill."

"If the worst happens, and ye go under, you 'll tell your father, *if I don't happen to see him first*, it was n't no job of mine, and I did my best to get ye out of it."

"Yes," said Jeff, in a faint voice.

"It may n't be so bad," said Bill, softening; "they *know*, d—n 'em, we 've got a pile aboard, ez well as if they seed that agent gin it ye, but they also know we 've pre-pared!"

"I was n't thinking of that, Bill; I was thinking of my father." And he told Bill of the gambling episode at Sacramento.

"D' ye mean to say ye left them hounds with a thousand dollars of yer hard-earned" ——

"Gambling gains, Bill," interrupted Jeff quietly.

"Exactly! Well!" Bill subsided into an incoherent growl. After a few moments' pause, he began again. "Yer ready as ye used to be with a six-shooter, Jeff, time 's when ye was a boy, and I uster chuck half-dollars in the air fur ye to make warts on?"

"I reckon," said Jeff, with a faint smile.

"Thar 's two p'ints on the road to be looked to: the woods beyond the blacksmith's shop that uster be; the fringe of alder and buckeye by the crossing below your house — p'ints where they kin fetch you without a show. Thar 's two ways o' meetin' them thar. One way ez to pull up and trust to luck and brag. The other way is to whip up and yell, and send the whole six kiting by like h—ll!"

"Yes," said Jeff.

"The only drawback to that plan is this: the road lies along the edge of a precipice, straight down a thousand feet into the river. Ef these devils get a shot into any one o' the six and it *drops*, the coach turns sharp off, and down we go, the whole kerboodle of us, plump into the Stanislaus!"

"*And they don't get the money*," said Jeff quietly.

"Well, no!" replied Yuba Bill, staring at Jeff, whose face was set as a flint against the darkness. "I should reckon not." He then drew a long breath, glanced at Jeff again, and said between his teeth, "Well, I 'm d—d!"

At the next station they changed horses, Bill personally supervising, especially as regarded the welfare and proper condition of Blue Grass, who here was brought out as a leader. Formerly there was no change of horses at this station, and this novelty excited Jeff's remark. "These yar chaps say thar 's no station at the Summit now," growled Bill, in explanation; "the hotel is closed, and it 's all private property, bought by some chap from 'Frisco. Thar ought to be a law agin such doin's!"

This suggested obliteration of the last traces of Miss Mayfield seemed to Jeff as only a corroboration of his premonition. He should never hear from her again! Yet to have stood under the roof that last sheltered her; to, perchance, have met some one who had seen her later — this was a fancy that had haunted him on his journey. It was all over now. Perhaps it was for the best.

With the sinking behind of the lights of the station, the occupants of the coach knew that the dangerous part of the journey had begun. The two guards in the coach had already made obtrusive and war-like preparations, to the ill-concealed disgust of Yuba Bill. "I 'd hev been willin' to get through this yar job without the burnin' of powder, but ef any of them devils ez is waitin' for us would be content with a shot at them fancy policemen inside, I'd pull up and give 'em a show!" Having relieved his mind, Bill said no more, and the two men relapsed into silence. The moon shone brightly and peacefully, a fact pointed out by Bill as unfavorably deepening the shadows of the woods, and bringing the coach and the road into greater relief.

An hour passed. What were Yuba Bill's thoughts are not a part of this history; that they were turbulent and aggressive might be inferred from the occasional growls and interjected oaths that broke from his lips. But Jeff, strange anomaly, due perhaps to youth and moonlight, was wrapped in a sensuous dream of Miss Mayfield, of the scent of her

dark hair as he had drawn her to his side, of the outlines of her sweet form, that had for a moment lightly touched his own — of anything, I fear, but the death he believed he was hastening to. But —

"Jeff," said Bill, in an unmistakable tone.

"Yes," said Jeff.

"*That ar clump o' buckeye on the ridge!* Ready there!" (Leaning over the box, to the guards within.) A responsive rustle in the coach, which now bounded forward as if instinct with life and intelligence.

"Jeff," said Bill, in an odd, altered voice, "take the lines a minit." Jeff took them. Bill stooped towards the boot. A peaceful moment! A peaceful outlook from the coach; the white moonlit road stretching to the ridge, no noise but the steady gallop of the horses!

Then a yellow flash, breaking from the darkness of the buckeye; a crack like the snap of a whip; Yuba Bill steadying himself for a moment, and then dropping at Jeff's feet!

"They got me, Jeff! But — *I drawed their fire!* Don't drop the lines! Don't speak! For — they — think I 'm *you* and you *me!*"

The flash had illuminated Jeff as to the danger, as to Bill's sacrifice, but above all, and overwhelming all, to a thrilling sense of his own power and ability.

Yet he sat like a statue. Six masked figures had appeared from the very ground, clinging to the bits of the horses. The coach stopped. Two wild purposeless shots — the first and last fired by the guards — were answered by the muzzle of six rifles pointed into the windows, and the passengers foolishly and impotently filed out into the road.

"Now, Bill," said a voice, which Jeff instantly recognized as the blacksmith's, "we won't keep ye long. So hand down the treasure."

The man's foot was on the wheel; in another instant

he would be beside Jeff, and discovery was certain. Jeff leaned over and unhooked the coach lamp, as if to assist him with its light. As if in turning, he *stumbled*, broke the lamp, ignited the kerosene, and scattered the wick and blazing fluid over the haunches of the wheelers! The maddened animals gave one wild plunge forwards, the coach followed twice its length, throwing the blacksmith under its wheels, and driving the other horses towards the bank. But as the lamp broke in Jeff's right hand, his practiced left hand discharged its hidden Derringer at the head of the robber who had held the bit of Blue Grass, and, throwing the useless weapon away, he laid the whip smartly on her back. She leaped forward madly, dragging the other leaders with her, and in the next moment they were free and wildly careering down the grade.

A dozen shots followed them. The men were protected by the coach, but Yuba Bill groaned.

"Are you hit again?" asked Jeff hastily. He had forgotten his saviour.

"No; but the horses are! I felt 'em! Look at 'em, Jeff."

Jeff had gathered up the almost useless reins. The horses were running away; but Blue Grass was limping.

"For God's sake," said Bill, desperately dragging his wounded figure above the dash-board, "keep her up! *Lift her up*, Jeff, till we pass the curve. Don't let her drop, or we're" —

"Can you hold the reins?" said Jeff quickly.

"Give 'em here!"

Jeff passed them to the wounded man. Then, with his bowie-knife between his teeth, he leaped over the dash-board on the backs of the wheelers. He extinguished the blazing drops that the wind had not blown out on their smarting haunches, and with the skill and instinct of a Mexican vaquero, made his way over their turbulent tossing backs to

Blue Grass, cut her traces and reins, and as the vehicle neared the curve, with a sharp lash, drove her to the bank, where she sank even as the coach darted by. Bill uttered a feeble "Hurrah!" but at the same moment the reins dropped from his fingers, and he sank at the bottom of the boot.

Riding postilion-wise, Jeff could control the horses. The dangerous curve was passed, but not the possibility of pursuit. The single leader he was bestriding was panting — more than that, he was *sweating*, and from the evidence of Jeff's hands, sweating *blood!* Back of his shoulder was a jagged hole, from which his life-blood was welling. The off-wheel horse was limping too. That last volley was no foolish outburst of useless rage, but was deliberate and premeditated skill. Jeff drew the reins, and as the coach stopped, the horse he was riding fell dead. Into the silence that followed broke the measured beat of horses' hoofs on the road above. He was pursued!

To select the best horse of the remaining unscathed three, to break open the boot and place the treasure on his back, and to abandon and leave the senseless Bill lying there, was the unhesitating work of a moment. Great heroes and great lovers are invariably one-ideaed men, and Jeff was at that moment both.

Eighty thousand dollars in gold-dust and Jeff's weight was a handicap. Nevertheless he flew forward like the wind. Presently he fell to listening. A certain hoof-beat in the rear was growing more distinct. A bitter thought flashed through his mind. He looked back. Over the hill appeared the foremost of his pursuers. It was the blacksmith, mounted on the fleetest horse in the county — Jeff's *own* horse — Rabbit!

But there are compensations in all new trials. As Jeff faced round again, he saw he had reached the open tableland, and the bleak walls and ghastly, untenanted windows

of the "Half-way House" rose before him in the distance. Jeff was master of the ground here! He was entering the shadow of the woods — Miss Mayfield's woods! and there was a cut off from the road, and a bridle-path, known only to himself, hard by. To find it, leap the roadside ditch, dash through the thicket, and rein up by the road again, was swiftly done.

Take a gentle woman, betray her trust, outrage her best feelings, drive her into a corner, and you have a fury! Take a gentle, trustful man, abuse him, show him the folly of this gentleness and kindness, prove to him that it is weakness, drive him into a corner, and you have a savage! And it was this savage, with an Indian's memory, and an Indian's eye and ear, that suddenly confronted the blacksmith.

What more! A single shot from a trained hand and one-ideaed intellect settled the blacksmith's business, and temporarily ended this Iliad! I say temporarily, for Mr. Dodd, formerly deputy-sheriff, prudently pulled up at the top of the hill, and observing his principal bend his head forwards and act like a drunken man, until he reeled, limp and sideways, from the saddle, and noticing further that Jeff took his place with a well-filled saddle-bag, concluded to follow cautiously and unobtrusively in the rear.

VII

But Jeff saw him not. With mind and will bent on one object — to reach the first habitation, the "Summit," and send back help and assistance to his wounded comrade — he urged Rabbit forward. The mare knew her rider, but he had no time for caresses. Through the smarting of his hands he had only just noticed that they were badly burned, and the skin was peeling from them; he had confounded the blood that was flowing from a cut on his scalp,

with that from the wounded horse. It was one hour yet to the "Summit," but the road was good, the moon was bright, he knew what Rabbit could do, and it was not yet ten o'clock.

As the white outbuildings and irregular outlines of the "Summit House" began to be visible, Jeff felt a singular return of his former dreamy abstraction. The hour of peril, anger, and excitement he had just passed through seemed something of years ago, or rather to be obliterated with all else that had passed since he had looked upon that scene. Yet it was all changed — strangely changed! What Jeff had taken for the white, wooden barns and outhouses were greenhouses and conservatories. The "Summit Hotel" was a picturesque villa, nestling in the self-same trees, but approached through cultivated fields, dwellings of laborers, parklike gates and walls, and all the bountiful appointments of wealth and security. Jeff thought of Yuba Bill's malediction, and understood it as he gazed.

The barking of dogs announced his near approach to the principal entrance. Lights were still burning in the upper windows of the house and its offices. He was at once surrounded by the strange medley of a Californian ranchero's service, peons, Chinese, and vaqueros. Jeff briefly stated his business. "Ah, Carrajo!" This was a matter for the major-domo, or, better, the padrone — Wilson! But the padrone, Wilson, called out by the tumult, appeared in person — a handsome, resolute, middle-aged man, who, in a twinkling, dispersed the group to barn and stable with a dozen orders of preparation, and then turned to Jeff.

"You are hurt; come in."

Jeff followed him dazedly into the house. The same sense of remote abstraction, of vague dreaminess, was overcoming him. He resented it, and fought against it, but in vain; he was only half conscious that his host had bathed his head and given him some slight restorative, had said

something to him soothingly, and had left him. Jeff wondered if he had fainted, or was about to faint, — he had a nervous dread of that womanish weakness, — or if he were really hurt worse than he believed. He tried to master himself and grasp the situation by minutely examining the room. It was luxuriously furnished; Jeff had but once before sat in such an arm-chair as the one that half embraced him, and as a boy he had dim recollections of a life like this, of which his father was part. To poor Jeff, with his throbbing head, his smarting hands, and his lapsing moments of half forgetfulness, this seemed to be a return of his old premonition. There was a vague perfume in the room, like that which he remembered when he was in the woods with Miss Mayfield. He believed he was growing faint again, and was about to rise, when the door opened behind him.

"Is there anything we can do for you? Mr. Wilson has gone to seek your friend, and has sent Manuel for a doctor."

Her voice! He rose hurriedly, turned; *she* was standing in the doorway!

She uttered a slight cry, turned very pale, advanced towards him, stopped and leaned against the chimney-piece.

"I did n't know it was *you*."

With her actual presence Jeff's dream and weakness fled. He rose up before her, his old bashful, stammering, awkward self.

"*I* did n't know *you* lived here, Miss Mayfield."

"If you had sent word you were coming," said Miss Mayfield, recovering her color brightly in one cheek.

The possibility of having sent a messenger in advance to advise Miss Mayfield of his projected visit did not strike Jeff as ridiculous. Your true lover is far beyond such trivialities. He accepted the rebuke meekly. He said he was sorry.

"You might have known it."

"What, Miss Mayfield?"

"That I was here, if you *wished* to know."

Jeff did not reply. He bowed his head and clasped his burned hands together. Miss Mayfield saw their raw surfaces, saw the ugly cut on his head, pitied him, but went on hastily, with both cheeks burning, to say, womanlike, what was then deepest in her heart.

"My brother-in-law told me your adventure; but I did not know until I entered this room that the gentleman I wished to help was one who had once rejected my assistance, who had misunderstood me, and cruelly insulted me! Oh, forgive me, Mr. Briggs" (Jeff had risen). "I did not mean *that*. But, Mr. Jeff — Jeff — oh!" (She had caught his tortured hand and had wrung a movement of pain from him.) "Oh, dear! what did I do now? But, Mr. Jeff, after what had passed, after what you said to me when you went away, when you were at that dreadful place, Campville, when you were two months in Sacramento, you might — *you ought to have let me know it!*"

Jeff turned. Her face, more beautiful than he had ever seen it, alive and eloquent with every thought that her woman's speech but half expressed, was very near his — so near, that under her honest eyes the wretched scales fell from his own, his self-wrought shackles crumbled away, and he dropped upon his knees at her feet as she sank into the chair he had quitted. Both his hands were grasped in her own.

"*You* went away, and I *stayed*," she said reflectively.

"I had no home, Miss Mayfield."

"Nor had I. I had to buy this," she said, with delicious simplicity; "and bring a family here too," she added, "in case *you*" — she stopped, with a slight color.

"Forgive me," said Jeff, burying his face in her hands.

"Jeff."

"Jessie."

"Don't you think you were a *little*—just a little—mean?"

"Yes."

Miss Mayfield uttered a faint sigh. He looked into her anxious cheeks and eyes, his arm stole round her; their lips met for the first time in one long lingering kiss. Then, I fear, for the second time.

"Jeff," said Miss Mayfield, suddenly becoming practical and sweetly possessory, "you must have your hands bound up in cotton."

"Yes," said Jeff cheerfully.

"And you must go instantly to bed."

Jeff stared.

"Because my sister will think it very late for me to be sitting up with a gentleman."

The idea that Miss Mayfield was responsible to anybody was something new to Jeff. But he said hastily, "I must stay and wait for Bill. He risked his life for me."

"Oh yes! You must tell me all about it. I may wait for *that*."

Jeff possessed himself of the chair; in some way he also possessed himself of Miss Mayfield without entirely dispossessing her. Then he told his story. He hesitated over the episode of the blacksmith. "I'm afraid I killed him, Jessie."

Miss Mayfield betrayed little concern at this possible extreme measure with a dangerous neighbor. "He cut your head, Jeff," she said, passing her little hand through his curls.

"No," said Jeff hastily "that must have been done *before*."

"Well," said Miss Mayfield conclusively, "he would if he 'd dared. And you brought off that wretched money in spite of him. Poor dear Jeff!"

"Yes," said Jeff, kissing her.

"Where is it?" asked Jessie, looking round the room.

"Oh, just out there!"

"Out where?"

"On my horse, you know, outside the door," continued Jeff, a little uneasily, as he rose. "I'll go and" —

"You careless boy," said Miss Mayfield, jumping up, "I'll go with you."

They passed out on the porch together, holding each other's hands, like children. The forgotten Rabbit was not there. Miss Mayfield called a vaquero.

"Ah, yes! — the caballero's horse. Of a certainty the other caballero had taken it!"

"The other caballero!" gasped Jeff.

"Si, señor. The one who arrived with you, or a moment, the very next moment, after you. 'Your friend,' he said."

Jeff staggered against the porch, and cast one despairing reproachful look at Miss Mayfield.

"Oh, Jeff! Jeff! don't look so! I know I ought not to have kept you! It 's a mistake, Jeff, believe me."

"It 's no mistake," said Jeff hoarsely. "Go!" he said, turning to the vaquero, "go! — bring"— But his speech failed. He attempted to gesticulate with his hands, ran forward a few steps, staggered, and fell fainting on the ground.

"Help me with the caballero into the blue room," said Miss Mayfield, white as Jeff. "And hark ye, Manuel! You know every ruffian, man or woman, on this road. That horse and those saddle-bags must be here to-morrow, if you have to pay *double what they 're worth!*"

"Si, señora."

Jeff went off into fever, into delirium, into helpless stupor. From time to time he moaned "Bill" and "the treasure." On the third day, in a lucid interval, as he lay staring at the wall, Miss Mayfield put in his hand a letter from the company, acknowledging the receipt of the treasure, thanking him for his zeal, and inclosing a handsome check.

Jeff sat up, and put his hands to his head.

"I told you it was taken by mistake, and was easily found," said Miss Mayfield, "did n't I?"

"Yes, — and Bill?"

"You know he is so much better that he expects to leave us next week."

"And — Jessie!"

"There — go to sleep!"

At the end of a week she introduced Jeff to her sister-in-law, having previously run her fingers through his hair to insure that becomingness to his curls which would better indicate his moral character; and spoke of him as one of her oldest Californian friends.

At the end of two weeks she again presented him as her affianced husband — a long engagement of a year being just passed. Mr. Wilson, who was bored by the mountain life, undertaken to please his rich wife and richer sister, saw a chance of escape here, and bore willing testimony to the distant Mr. and Mrs. Mayfield of the excellence of Miss Jessie's choice. And Yuba Bill was Jeff's best man.

The name of Briggs remained a power in Tuolumne and Calaveras County. Mr. and Mrs. Briggs never had but one word of disagreement or discussion. One day, Jeff, looking over some old accounts of his wife's, found an unreceipted, unvouched-for expenditure of twenty thousand dollars. "What is this for, Jessie?" he asked.

"Oh, it 's all right, Jeff!"

But here the now business-like and practical Mr. Briggs, father of a family, felt called upon to make some general remarks regarding the necessity of exactitude in accounts, etc.

"But I 'd rather not tell you, Jeff."

"But you ought to, Jessie."

"Well then, dear, it was to get those saddle-bags of yours from that rascal, Dodd," said little Mrs. Briggs meekly.

THE GREAT DEADWOOD MYSTERY

PART I

It was growing quite dark in the telegraph office at Cottonwood, Tuolumne County, California. The office, a box-like inclosure, was separated from the public room of the Miners' Hotel by a thin partition, and the operator, who was also News and Express Agent at Cottonwood, had closed his window, and was lounging by his news-stand preparatory to going home. Accustomed as he was to long intervals of idleness, he was fast becoming bored.

The tread of mud-muffled boots on the veranda and the entrance of two men offered a momentary excitement. He recognized in the strangers two prominent citizens of Cottonwood; and their manner bespoke business. One of them proceeded to the desk, wrote a dispatch, and handed it to the other interrogatively.

"That 's about the way the thing p'ints," responded his companion.

"I reckoned it only squar' to use his dientikal words?"

"That 's so."

The first speaker turned to the operator with the dispatch.

"How soon can you shove her through?"

The operator glanced professionally over the address and the length of the dispatch.

"Now," he answered promptly.

"And she gets there" —

"To-night; but there 's no delivery until to-morrow."

"Shove her through to-night, and say there 's an extra twenty left here for delivery."

The operator, accustomed to all kinds of extravagant outlay for expedition, replied that he would lay this proposition, with the dispatch, before the San Francisco office. He then took it and read it — and re-read it. He preserved the usual professional apathy — had doubtless sent many more enigmatical and mysterious messages — but, nevertheless, when he finished, he raised his eyes inquiringly to his customer. That gentleman, who enjoyed a reputation for equal spontaneity of temper and revolver, met his gaze a little impatiently. The operator had recourse to a trick. Under the pretense of misunderstanding the message, he obliged the sender to repeat it aloud for the sake of accuracy, and even suggested a few verbal alterations, ostensibly to insure correctness, but really to extract further information. Nevertheless, the man doggedly persisted in a literal transcript of his message. The operator went to his instrument hesitatingly.

"I suppose," he added half questioningly, "there ain't no chance of a mistake. This address is Rightbody, that rich old Bostonian that everybody knows. There ain't but one?"

"That 's the address," responded the first speaker coolly.

"Did n't know the old chap had investments out here," suggested the operator, lingering at his instrument.

"No more did I," was the insufficient reply.

For some few moments nothing was heard but the click of the instrument, as the operator worked the key with the usual appearance of imparting confidence to a somewhat reluctant hearer who preferred to talk himself. The two men stood by, watching his motions with the usual awe of the unprofessional. When he had finished, they laid before him two gold-pieces. As the operator took them up, he could not help saying, —

"The old man went off kinder sudden, did n't he? Had no time to write?"

"Not sudden for that kind o' man," was the exasperating reply.

But the speaker was not to be disconcerted. "If there is an answer" —

"There ain't any," replied the first speaker quietly.

"Why?"

"Because the man ez sent the message is dead."

"But it 's signed by you two."

"On'y ez witnesses — eh?" appealed the first speaker to his comrade.

"On'y ez witnesses," responded the other.

The operator shrugged his shoulders. The business concluded, the first speaker slightly relaxed. He nodded to the operator, and turned to the bar-room with a pleasing social impulse. When their glasses were set down empty, the first speaker, with a cheerful condemnation of the hard times and the weather, apparently dismissed all previous proceedings from his mind, and lounged out with his companion. At the corner of the street they stopped.

"Well, that job 's done," said the first speaker, by way of relieving the slight social embarrassment of parting.

"Thet 's so," responded his companion, and shook his hand.

They parted. A gust of wind swept through the pines, and struck a faint Æolian cry from the wires above their heads, and the rain and the darkness again slowly settled upon Cottonwood.

The message lagged a little at San Francisco, laid over half an hour at Chicago, and fought longitude the whole way, so that it was past midnight when the "all-night" operator took it from the wires at Boston. But it was freighted with a mandate from the San Francisco office; and a messenger was procured, who sped with it through dark snow-bound streets, between the high walls of close-shuttered rayless houses to a certain formal square, ghostly

with snow-covered statues. Here he ascended the broad steps of a reserved and solid-looking mansion, and pulled a bronze bell-knob that, somewhere within those chaste recesses, after an apparent reflective pause, coldly communicated the fact that a stranger was waiting without — as he ought. Despite the lateness of the hour, there was a slight glow from the windows, clearly not enough to warm the messenger with indications of a festivity within, but yet bespeaking, as it were, some prolonged though subdued excitement. The sober servant, who took the dispatch and receipted for it as gravely as if witnessing a last will and testament, respectfully paused before the entrance of the drawing-room. The sound of measured and rhetorical speech, through which the occasional catarrhal cough of the New England coast struggled, as the only effort of nature not wholly repressed, came from its heavily curtained recesses; for the occasion of the evening had been the reception and entertainment of various distinguished persons, and, as had been epigrammatically expressed by one of the guests, "the history of the country" was taking its leave in phrases more or less memorable and characteristic. Some of these valedictory axioms were clever, some witty, a few profound, but always left as a genteel contribution to the entertainer. Some had been already prepared, and, like a card, had served and identified the guest at other mansions.

The last guest departed, the last carriage rolled away, when the servant ventured to indicate the existence of the dispatch to his master, who was standing on the hearth-rug in an attitude of wearied self-righteousness. He took it, opened it, read it, re-read it, and said, —

"There must be some mistake! It is not for me; call the boy, Waters."

Waters, who was perfectly aware that the boy had left, nevertheless obediently walked towards the hall door, but was recalled by his master.

"No matter — at present!"

"It's nothing serious, William?" asked Mrs. Rightbody, with languid wifely concern.

"No, nothing. Is there a light in my study?"

"Yes. But before you go, can you give me a moment or two?"

Mr. Rightbody turned a little impatiently towards his wife. She had thrown herself languidly on the sofa, her hair was slightly disarranged, and part of a slippered foot was visible. She might have been a finely formed woman, but even her careless déshabillé left the general impression that she was severely flanneled throughout, and that any ostentation of womanly charm was under vigorous sanitary surveillance.

"Mrs. Marvin told me to-night that her son made no secret of his serious attachment for our Alice, and that if I was satisfied Mr. Marvin would be glad to confer with you at once."

The information did not seem to absorb Mr. Rightbody's wandering attention, but rather increased his impatience. He said hastily that he would speak of that to-morrow; and, partly by way of reprisal, and partly to dismiss the subject, added, —

"Positively, James must pay some attention to the register and the thermometer. It was over 70° to-night, and the ventilating draught was closed in the drawing-room."

"That was because Professor Ammon sat near it, and the old gentleman's tonsils are so sensitive."

"He ought to know from Dr. Dyer Doit that systematic and regular exposure to draughts stimulates the mucous membrane, while fixed air, over 60° invariably" —

"I am afraid, William," interrupted Mrs. Rightbody, with feminine adroitness, adopting her husband's topic with a view of thereby directing him from it, — "I'm afraid that people do not yet appreciate the substitution of bouil-

lon for punch and ices. I observed that Mr. Spondee declined it, and I fancied looked disappointed. The fibrine and wheat in liqueur-glasses passed quite unnoticed too."

"And yet each half-drachm contained the half-digested substance of a pound of beef. I'm surprised at Spondee," continued Mr. Rightbody aggrievedly. "Exhausting his brain and nerve force by the highest creative efforts of the Muse, he prefers perfumed and diluted alcohol flavored with carbonic acid gas. Even Mrs. Faringway admitted to me that the sudden lowering of the temperature of the stomach by the introduction of ice" —

"Yes, but she took a lemon ice at the last Dorothea Reception, and asked me if I had observed that the lower animals refused their food at a temperature over 60°."

Mr. Rightbody again moved impatiently toward the door. Mrs. Rightbody eyed him curiously.

"You will not write, I hope? Dr. Keppler told me to-night that your cerebral symptoms interdicted any prolonged mental strain."

"I must consult a few papers," responded Mr. Rightbody curtly, as he entered his library.

It was a richly furnished apartment, morbidly severe in its decorations, which were symptomatic of a gloomy dyspepsia of art, then quite prevalent. A few curios, very ugly, but providentially equally rare, were scattered about; there were various bronzes, marbles, and casts, all requiring explanation, and so fulfilling their purpose of promoting conversation and exhibiting the erudition of their owner. There were souvenirs of travel with a history, old bric-à-brac with a pedigree, but little or nothing that challenged attention for itself alone. In all cases the superiority of the owner to his possessions was admitted. As a natural result nobody ever lingered there, the servants avoided the room, and no child was ever known to play in it.

Mr. Rightbody turned up the gas, and from a cabinet

of drawers, precisely labeled, drew a package of letters. These he carefully examined. All were discolored, and made dignified by age; but some, in their original freshness, must have appeared trifling and inconsistent with any correspondent of Mr. Rightbody. Nevertheless, that gentleman spent some moments in carefully perusing them, occasionally referring to the telegram in his hand. Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Mr. Rightbody started, made a half-unconscious movement to return the letters to the drawer, turned the telegram face downwards, and then, somewhat harshly, stammered, —

"Eh? Who's there? Come in!"

"I beg your pardon, papa," said a very pretty girl, entering, without, however, the slightest trace of apology or awe in her manner, and taking a chair with the self-possession and familiarity of an habitué of the room; "but I knew it was not your habit to write late, so I supposed you were not busy. I am on my way to bed."

She was so very pretty, and withal so utterly unconscious of it, or perhaps so consciously superior to it, that one was provoked into a more critical examination of her face. But this only resulted in a reiteration of her beauty, and, perhaps, the added facts that her dark eyes were very womanly, her rich complexion eloquent, and her chiseled lips full enough to be passionate or capricious, notwithstanding that their general effect suggested neither caprice, womanly weakness, nor passion.

With the instinct of an embarrassed man, Mr. Rightbody touched the topic he would have preferred to avoid.

"I suppose we must talk over to-morrow," he hesitated, "this matter of yours and Mr. Marvin's? Mrs. Marvin has formally spoken to your mother."

Miss Alice lifted her bright eyes intelligently, but not joyfully, and the color of action rather than embarrassment rose to her round cheeks.

"Yes, *he* said she would," she answered simply.

"At present," continued Mr. Rightbody still awkwardly, "I see no objection to the proposed arrangement."

Miss Alice opened her round eyes at this. "Why, papa, I thought it had been all settled long ago. Mamma knew it, you knew it. Last July mamma and you talked it over."

"Yes, yes," returned her father, fumbling his papers; "that is — well, we will talk of it to-morrow." In fact, Mr. Rightbody *had* intended to give the affair a proper attitude of seriousness and solemnity by due precision of speech and some apposite reflections when he should impart the news to his daughter, but felt himself unable to do it now. "I am glad, Alice," he said at last, "that you have quite forgotten your previous whims and fancies. You see *we* are right."

"Oh, I dare say, papa, if I 'm to be married at all, that Mr. Marvin is in every way suitable."

Mr. Rightbody looked at his daughter narrowly. There was not the slightest impatience nor bitterness in her manner; it was as well regulated as the sentiment she expressed.

"Mr. Marvin is" — he began.

"I know what Mr. Marvin *is*," interrupted Miss Alice, "and he has promised me that I shall be allowed to go on with my studies the same as before. I shall graduate with my class, and if I prefer to practice my profession, I can do so in two years after our marriage."

"In two years?" queried Mr. Rightbody curiously.

"Yes. You see, in case we should have a child, that would give me time enough to wean it."

Mr. Rightbody looked at this flesh of his flesh, pretty and palpable flesh as it was; but being confronted as equally with the brain of his brain, all he could do was to say meekly, —

"Yes, certainly. We will see about all that to-morrow."

Miss Alice rose. Something in the free, unfettered swing of her arms, as she rested them lightly, after a half yawn, on her lithe hips, suggested his next speech, although still distrait and impatient.

"You continue your exercise with the health-lift yet, I see."

"Yes, papa, but I had to give up the flannels. I don't see how mamma could wear them. But my dresses are high-necked, and by bathing I toughen my skin. See," she added, as with a child-like unconsciousness she unfastened two or three buttons of her gown, and exposed the white surface of her throat and neck to her father, "I can defy a chill."

Mr. Rightbody, with something akin to a genuine playful, paternal laugh, leaned forward and kissed her forehead.

"It's getting late, Ally," he said parentally, but not dictatorially. "Go to bed."

"I took a nap of three hours this afternoon," said Miss Alice, with a dazzling smile, "to anticipate this dissipation. Good-night, papa. To-morrow, then."

"To-morrow," repeated Mr. Rightbody, with his eyes still fixed upon the girl vaguely. "Good-night."

Miss Alice tripped from the room, possibly a trifle the more light heartedly that she had parted from her father in one of his rare moments of illogical human weakness. And perhaps it was well for the poor girl that she kept this single remembrance of him, when, I fear, in after years, his methods, his reasoning, and indeed all he had tried to impress upon her childhood, had faded from her memory.

For, when she had left, Mr. Rightbody fell again to the examination of his old letters. This was quite absorbing; so much so that he did not notice the footsteps of Mrs. Rightbody on the staircase as she passed to her chamber, nor that she had paused on the landing to look through

the glass hall door on her husband, as he sat there with the letters beside him and the telegram opened before him. Had she waited a moment later, she would have seen him rise and walk to the sofa with a disturbed air and a slight confusion, so that on reaching it he seemed to hesitate to lie down, although pale and evidently faint. Had she still waited, she would have seen him rise again with an agonized effort, stagger to the table, fumblingly refold and replace the papers in the cabinet, and lock it; and, although now but half conscious, hold the telegram over the gas-flame till it was consumed. For had she waited until this moment, she would have flown unhesitatingly to his aid, as, this act completed, he staggered again, reached his hand toward the bell, but vainly, and then fell prone upon the sofa.

But, alas! no providential nor accidental hand was raised to save him, or anticipate the progress of this story. And when, half an hour later, Mrs. Rightbody, a little alarmed and more indignant at his violation of the doctor's rules, appeared upon the threshold, Mr. Rightbody lay upon the sofa — dead!

With bustle, with thronging feet, with the irruption of strangers, and a hurrying to and fro, but, more than all, with an impulse and emotion unknown to the mansion when its owner was in life, Mrs. Rightbody strove to call back the vanished life; but in vain. The highest medical intelligence, called from its bed at this strange hour, saw only the demonstration of its theories made a year before. Mr. Rightbody was dead — without doubt — without mystery — even as a correct man should die; logically, and indorsed by the highest medical authority.

But even in the confusion, Mrs. Rightbody managed to speed a messenger to the telegraph office for a copy of the dispatch received by Mr. Rightbody, but now missing.

In the solitude of her own room, and without a confidant, she read these words: —

Copy.

To Mr. Adams Rightbody, Boston, Mass.

Joshua Silsbee died suddenly this morning. His last request was that you should remember your sacred compact with him of thirty years ago.

(Signed) SEVENTY-FOUR,
SEVENTY-FIVE.

In the darkened home, and amid the formal condolements of their friends, who had called to gaze upon the scarcely cold features of their late associate, Mrs. Rightbody managed to send another dispatch. It was addressed to "Seventy-Four and Seventy-Five," Cottonwood. In a few hours she received the following enigmatical response: —

"A horse-thief, named Josh Silsbee, was lynched yesterday morning by the Vigilantes at Deadwood."

PART II

The spring of 1874 was retarded in the Californian Sierras. So much so that certain Eastern tourists who had early ventured into the Yosemite Valley found themselves, one May morning, snow-bound against the tempestuous shoulders of El Capitan. So furious was the onset of the wind at the Upper Merced Cañon, that even so respectable a lady as Mrs. Rightbody was fain to cling to the neck of her guide to keep her seat in the saddle; while Miss Alice, scorning all masculine assistance, was hurled, a lovely chaos, against the snowy wall of the chasm. Mrs. Rightbody screamed; Miss Alice raged under her breath, but scrambled to her feet again in silence.

"I told you so," said Mrs. Rightbody, in an indignant

whisper as her daughter again ranged beside her. "I warned you especially, Alice — that — that" —

"What?" interrupted Miss Alice curtly.

"That you would need your chemiloons and high boots," said Mrs. Rightbody, in a regretful undertone, slightly increasing her distance from the guides.

Miss Alice shrugged her pretty shoulders scornfully, but ignored her mother's implication.

"You were particularly warned against going into the valley at this season," she only replied grimly.

Mrs. Rightbody raised her eyes impatiently.

"You know how anxious I was to discover your poor father's strange correspondent, Alice; you have no consideration."

"But when you *have* discovered him — what then?" queried Miss Alice.

"What then?"

"Yes. My belief is that you will find the telegram only a mere business cipher, and all this quest mere nonsense."

"Alice! why, *you* yourself thought your father's conduct that night very strange. Have you forgotten?"

The young lady had *not*, but for some far-reaching feminine reason chose to ignore it at that moment, when her late tumble in the snow was still fresh in her mind.

"And this woman — whoever she may be," continued Mrs. Rightbody.

"How do you know there's a woman in the case?" interrupted Miss Alice, wickedly, I fear.

"How do — I — know — there's a woman?" slowly ejaculated Mrs. Rightbody, floundering in the snow and the unexpected possibility of such a ridiculous question. But here her guide flew to her assistance, and estopped further speech. And, indeed, a grave problem was before them.

The road that led to their single place of refuge — a cabin, half hotel, half trading-post, scarce a mile away — skirted the base of the rocky dome, and passed perilously near the precipitous wall of the valley. There was a rapid descent of a hundred yards or more to this terrace-like passage, and the guides paused for a moment of consultation, coolly oblivious alike to the terrified questioning of Mrs. Rightbody or the half-insolent independence of the daughter. The elder guide was russet-bearded, stout, and humorous; the younger was dark-bearded, slight, and serious.

"Ef you kin git young Bunker Hill to let you tote her on your shoulders, I'll git the madam to hang on to me," came to Mrs. Rightbody's horrified ears as the expression of her particular companion.

"Freeze to the old gal, and don't reckon on me if the daughter starts in to play it alone," was the enigmatical response of the younger guide.

Miss Alice overheard both propositions; and before the two men returned to their side, that high-spirited young lady had urged her horse down the declivity.

Alas! at this moment a gust of whirling snow swept down upon her. There was a flounder, a misstep, a fatal strain on the wrong rein, a fall, a few plucky but unavailing struggles, and both horse and rider slid ignominiously down toward the rocky shelf. Mrs. Rightbody screamed. Miss Alice, from a confused débris of snow and ice, uplifted a vexed and coloring face to the younger guide — a little the more angrily, perhaps, that she saw a shade of impatience on his face.

"Don't move, but tie one end of the 'lass' under your arms and throw me the other," he said quietly.

"What do you mean by 'lass' — the lasso?" asked Miss Alice disgustedly.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then why don't you say so?"

"Oh, Alice!" reproachfully interpolated Mrs. Rightbody, encircled by the elder guide's stalwart arm.

Miss Alice deigned no reply, but drew the loop of the lasso over her shoulders, and let it drop to her round waist. Then she essayed to throw the other end to the guide. Dismal failure! The first fling nearly knocked her off the ledge, the second went all wild against the rocky wall, the third caught in a thorn bush, twenty feet below her companion's feet. Miss Alice's arm sunk helplessly to her side, at which signal of unqualified surrender the younger guide threw himself half-way down the slope, worked his way to the thorn-bush, hung for a moment perilously over the parapet, secured the lasso, and then began to pull away at his lovely burden. Miss Alice was no dead weight, however, but steadily half scrambled on her hands and knees to within a foot or two of her rescuer. At this too familiar proximity, she stood up, and leaned a little stiffly against the line, causing the guide to give an extra pull, which had the lamentable effect of landing her almost in his arms. As it was, her intelligent forehead struck his nose sharply, and, I regret to add, treating of a romantic situation, caused that somewhat prominent sign and token of a hero to bleed freely. Miss Alice instantly clapped a handful of snow over his nostrils.

"Now elevate your right arm," she said commandingly.

He did as he was bidden — but sulkily.

"That compresses the artery."

No man, with a pretty woman's hand and a handful of snow over his mouth and nose, could effectively utter a heroic sentence, nor with his arm elevated stiffly over his head assume a heroic attitude. But when his mouth was free again, he said half sulkily, half apologetically, —

"I might have known a girl could n't throw worth a cent."

"Why?" demanded Miss Alice sharply.

"Because — why — because — you see — they have n't got the experience," he stammered feebly.

"Nonsense, they have n't the clavicle — that 's all! It 's because I 'm a woman, and smaller in the collar-bone, that I have n't the play of the forearm which you have. See!" She squared her shoulders slightly, and turned the blaze of her dark eyes full on his. "Experience, indeed! A girl can learn anything a boy can."

Apprehension took the place of ill humor in her hearer. He turned his eyes hastily away, and glanced above him. The elder guide had gone forward to catch Miss Alice's horse, which, relieved of his rider, was floundering toward the trail. Mrs. Rightbody was nowhere to be seen. And these two were still twenty feet below the trail!

There was an awkward pause.

"Shall I pull you up the same way?" he queried. Miss Alice looked at his nose, and hesitated. "Or will you take my hand?" he added, in surly impatience. To his surprise, Miss Alice took his hand, and they began the ascent together.

But the way was difficult and dangerous. Once or twice her feet slipped on the smoothly worn rock beneath, and she confessed to an inward thankfulness when her uncertain feminine hand-grip was exchanged for his strong arm around her waist. Not that he was ungentle, but Miss Alice angrily felt that he had once or twice exercised his superior masculine functions in a rough way; and yet the next moment she would have probably rejected the idea that she had even noticed it. There was no doubt, however, that he *was* a little surly.

A fierce scramble finally brought them back in safety to the trail; but in the action Miss Alice's shoulder, striking a projecting boulder, wrung from her a feminine cry of pain, her first sign of womanly weakness. The guide stopped instantly.

"I am afraid I hurt you?"

She raised her brown lashes, a trifle moist from suffering, looked in his eyes, and dropped her own. Why, she could not tell. And yet he had certainly a kind face, despite its seriousness; and a fine face, albeit unshorn and weather-beaten. Her own eyes had never been so near to any man's before save her lover's; and yet she had never seen so much in even his. She slipped her hand away, not with any reference to him, but rather to ponder over this singular experience, and somehow felt uncomfortable thereat.

Nor was he less so. It was but a few days ago that he had accepted the charge of this young woman from the elder guide, who was the recognized escort of the Rightbody party, having been a former correspondent of her father's. He had been hired like any other guide, but had undertaken the task with that chivalrous enthusiasm which the average Californian always extends to the sex so rare to him. But the illusion had passed, and he had dropped into a sulky practical sense of his situation, perhaps fraught with less danger to himself. Only when appealed to by his manhood or her weakness, he had forgotten his wounded vanity.

He strode moodily ahead, dutifully breaking the path for her in the direction of the distant cañon, where Mrs. Rightbody and her friend awaited them. Miss Alice was first to speak. In this trackless, unchartered *terra incognita* of the passions, it is always the woman who steps out to lead the way.

"You know this place very well. I suppose you have lived here long?"

"Yes."

"You were not born here — no?"

A long pause.

"I observe they call you 'Stanislaus Joe.' Of course that is not your real name?" (Mem. Miss Alice had

never called him *anything*, usually prefacing any request with a languid, "Oh-er-er, please, mister-er-a!" — explicit enough for his station.)

"No."

Miss Alice (trotting after him, and bawling in his ear), "*What* name did you say?"

The man (doggedly), "I don't know."

Nevertheless, when they reached the cabin, after an half-hour's buffeting with the storm, Miss Alice applied herself to her mother's escort, Mr. Ryder.

"What's the name of the man who takes care of my horse?"

"Stanislaus Joe," responded Mr. Ryder.

"Is that all?"

"No; sometimes he's called Joe Stanislaus."

Miss Alice (satirically), "I suppose it's the custom here to send young ladies out with gentlemen who hide their names under an alias?"

Mr. Ryder (greatly perplexed), "Why, dear me, Miss Alice, you allers 'peared to me as a gal as was able to take keer" —

Miss Alice (interrupting with a wounded dove-like timidity), "Oh, never mind, please!"

The cabin offered but scanty accommodation to the tourists, which fact, when indignantly presented by Mrs. Rightbody, was explained by the good-humored Ryder from the circumstance that the usual hotel was only a slight affair of boards, cloth, and paper, put up during the season and partly dismantled in the fall. "You could n't be kept warm enough there," he added. Nevertheless, Miss Alice noticed that both Mr. Ryder and Stanislaus Joe retired there with their pipes, after having prepared the ladies' supper with the assistance of an Indian woman, who apparently emerged from the earth at the coming of the party, and disappeared as mysteriously.

The stars came out brightly before they slept, and the next morning a clear unwinking sun beamed with almost summer power through the shutterless window of their cabin, and ironically disclosed the details of its rude interior. Two or three mangy, half-eaten buffalo robes, a bear-skin, some suspicious-looking blankets, rifles and saddles, deal tables and barrels, made up its scant inventory. A strip of faded calico hung before a recess near the chimney, but so blackened by smoke and age that even feminine curiosity respected its secret. Mrs. Rightbody was in high spirits, and informed her daughter that she was at last on the track of her husband's unknown correspondent. "Seventy-Four and Seventy-Five represent two members of the Vigilance Committee, my dear, and Mr. Ryder will assist me to find them."

"Mr. Ryder!" ejaculated Miss Alice, in scornful astonishment.

"Alice," said Mrs. Rightbody, with a suspicious assumption of sudden defense, "you injure yourself — you injure me by this exclusive attitude. Mr. Ryder is a friend of your father's, an exceedingly well-informed gentleman. I have not, of course, imparted to him the extent of my suspicions. But he can help me to what I must and will know. You might treat him a little more civilly — or, at least, a little better than you do his servant, your guide. Mr. Ryder is a gentleman, and not a paid courier."

Miss Alice was suddenly attentive. When she spoke again she asked, "Why do you not find out something about this Silsbee — who died — or was hung — or something of that kind?"

"Child," said Mrs. Rightbody, "don't you see, there was no Silsbee, or if there was, he was simply the confidant of that — woman!"

A knock at the door, announcing the presence of Mr. Ryder and Stanislaus Joe with the horses, checked Mrs.

Rightbody's speech. As the animals were being packed, Mrs. Rightbody for a moment withdrew in confidential conversation with Mr. Ryder, and, to the young lady's still greater annoyance, left her alone with Stanislaus Joe. Miss Alice was not in good temper, but she felt it necessary to say something.

"I hope the hotel offers better quarters for travelers than this in summer," she began.

"It does."

"Then this does not belong to it?"

"No, ma'am."

"Who lives here, then?"

"I do."

"I beg your pardon," stammered Miss Alice, "I thought you lived where we hired — where we met you — in — in — you must excuse me."

"I 'm not a regular guide; but as times were hard, and I was out of grub, I took the job."

"Out of grub!" "job!" And *she* was the "job"! What would Henry Marvin say? it would nearly kill him. She began herself to feel a little frightened, and walked towards the door.

"One moment, miss!"

The young girl hesitated. The man's tone was surly, and yet indicated a certain kind of half-pathetic grievance. Her curiosity got the better of her prudence, and she turned back.

"That morning," he began hastily, "when we were coming down the valley you picked me up twice."

"I picked *you* up?" repeated the astonished Alice.

"Yes — *contradicted* me, that 's what I mean. Once when you said those rocks were volcanic; once when you said the flower you picked was a poppy. I did n't let on at the time, for it was n't my say; but all the while you were talking I might have laid for you" —

"I don't understand you," said Alice haughtily.

"I might have entrapped you before folks. But I only want you to know that *I*'m right, and here are the books to show it."

He drew aside the dingy calico curtain, revealed a small shelf of bulky books, took down two large volumes, one of Botany, one of Geology, nervously sought his text, and put them in Alice's outstretched hands.

"I had no intention" — she began half proudly, half embarrassed.

"Am I right, miss?" he interrupted.

"I presume you are, if you say so."

"That 's all, ma'am! Thank you."

Before the girl had time to reply, he was gone. When he again returned, it was with her horse, and Mrs. Rightbody and Ryder were awaiting her. But Miss Alice noticed that his own horse was missing.

"Are you not going with us?" she asked.

"No, ma'am."

"Oh, indeed!"

Miss Alice felt her speech was a feeble conventionalism, but it was all she could say. She, however, *did* something. Hitherto it had been her habit to systematically reject his assistance in mounting to her seat. Now she awaited him. As he approached, she smiled and put out her little foot. He instantly stooped; she placed it in his hand, rose with a spring, and for one supreme moment Stanislaus Joe held her unresistingly in his arms. The next moment she was in the saddle, but in that brief interval of sixty seconds she had uttered a volume in a single sentence: —

"I hope you will forgive me!"

He muttered a reply, and turned his face aside quickly as if to hide it.

Miss Alice cantered forward with a smile, but pulled her hat down over her eyes as she joined her mother. She was blushing.

PART III

Mr. Ryder was as good as his word. A day or two later he entered Mrs. Rightbody's parlor at the Chrysopolis Hotel in Stockton, with the information that he had seen the mysterious senders of the dispatch, and that they were now in the office of the hotel waiting her pleasure. Mr. Ryder further informed her that these gentlemen had only stipulated that they should not reveal their real names, and that they should be introduced to her simply as the respective Seventy-Four and Seventy-Five who had signed the dispatch sent to the late Mr. Rightbody.

Mrs. Rightbody at first demurred to this; but on the assurance from Mr. Ryder that this was the only condition on which an interview would be granted, finally consented.

"You will find them square men, even if they are a little rough, ma'am; but if you 'd like me to be present, I 'll stop; though I reckon if ye 'd calkilated on that, you 'd have had me take care o' your business by proxy, and not come yourself three thousand miles to do it."

Mrs. Rightbody believed it better to see them alone.

"All right, ma'am. I 'll hang round out here, and ef ye should happen to hev a ticklin' in your throat and a bad spell o' coughin', I 'll drop in, careless like, to see if you don't want them drops. Sabe?"

And with an exceedingly arch wink, and a slight familiar tap on Mrs. Rightbody's shoulder, which might have caused the late Mr. Rightbody to burst his sepulchre, he withdrew.

A very timid, hesitating tap on the door was followed by the entrance of two men, both of whom, in general size, strength, and uncouthness, were ludicrously inconsistent with their diffident announcement. They proceeded in Indian file to the centre of the room, faced Mrs. Rightbody,

acknowledged her deep courtesy by a strong shake of the hand, and drawing two chairs opposite to her, sat down side by side.

"I presume I have the pleasure of addressing" — began Mrs. Rightbody.

The man directly opposite Mrs. Rightbody turned to the other inquiringly.

The other man nodded his head, and replied, —

"Seventy-Four."

"Seventy-Five," promptly followed the other.

Mrs. Rightbody paused, a little confused.

"I have sent for you," she began again, "to learn something more of the circumstances under which you gentlemen sent a dispatch to my late husband."

"The circumstances," replied Seventy-Four quietly, with a side glance at his companion, "panned out about in this yer style. We hung a man named Josh Silsbee down at Deadwood for hoss-stealin'. When I say *we*, I speak for Seventy-Five yer, as is present, as well as representin', so to speak, seventy-two other gents as is scattered. We hung Josh Silsbee on squar', pretty squar' evidence. Afore he was strung up, Seventy-Five yer axed him, accordin' to custom, ef there was ennything he had to say, or enny request that he allowed to make of us. He turns to Seventy-Five yer, and" —

Here he paused suddenly, looking at his companion.

"He sez, sez he," began Seventy-Five, taking up the narrative; "he sez, 'Kin I write a letter?' sez he. Sez I, 'Not much, ole man; ye 've got no time.' Sez he, 'Kin I send a dispatch by telegraph?' I sez, 'Heave ahead.' He sez, — these is his dientikal words, — 'Send to Adam Rightbody, Boston. Tell him to remember his sacred compack with me thirty years ago.'"

"'His sacred compack with me thirty years ago,'" echoed Seventy-Four. "His dientikal words."

"What was the compact?" asked Mrs. Rightbody anxiously.

Seventy-Four looked at Seventy-Five, and then both arose and retired to the corner of the parlor, where they engaged in a slow but whispered deliberation. Presently they returned, and sat down again.

"We allow," said Seventy-Four, quietly but decidedly, "that *you* know what that sacred compact was."

Mrs. Rightbody lost her temper and her truthfulness together. "Of course," she said hurriedly, "I know; but do you mean to say that you gave this poor man no further chance to explain before you murdered him?"

Seventy-Four and Seventy-Five both rose again slowly, and retired. When they returned again and sat down, Seventy-Five, who by this time, through some subtle magnetism, Mrs. Rightbody began to recognize as the superior power, said gravely, —

"We wish to say, regarding this yer murder, that Seventy-Four and me is equally responsible. That we reckon also to represent, so to speak, seventy-two other gentlemen as is scattered. That we are ready, Seventy-Four and me, to take and holt that responsibility now and at any time afore every man or men as kin be fetched agin us. We wish to say that this yer say of ours holds good yer in Californy or in any part of these United States."

"Or in Canady," suggested Seventy-Four.

"Or in Canady. We would n't agree to cross the water or go to furrin parts, unless absolutely necessary. We leaves the chise of weppings to your principal, ma'am, or being a lady, ma'am, and interested, to any one you may fetch to act for him. An advertisement in any of the Sacramento papers, or a playcard or handbill stuck on to a tree near Deadwood, saying that Seventy-Four or Seventy-Five will communicate with this yer principal or agent of yours, will fetch us — allers."

Mrs. Rightbody, a little alarmed and desperate, saw her blunder. "I mean nothing of the kind," she said hastily. "I only expected that you might have some further details of this interview with Silsbee — that perhaps you could tell me" — a bold, bright thought crossed Mrs. Rightbody's mind — "something more about *her*."

The two men looked at each other.

"I suppose your society have no objection to giving me information about *her*," said Mrs. Rightbody eagerly.

Another quiet conversation in the corner, and the return of both men.

"We want to say that we've no objection."

Mrs. Rightbody's heart beat high. Her boldness had made her penetration good. Yet she felt she must not alarm the men needlessly.

"Will you inform me to what extent Mr. Rightbody, my late husband, was interested in her?"

This time it seemed an age to Mrs. Rightbody before the men returned from their solemn consultation in the corner. She could both hear and feel that their discussion was more animated than their previous conferences. She was a little mortified, however, when they sat down, to hear Seventy-Four say slowly, —

"We wish to say that we don't allow to say *how* much."

"Do you not think that the 'sacred compact' between Mr. Rightbody and Mr. Silsbee referred to her."

"We reckon it do."

Mrs. Rightbody, flushed and animated, would have given worlds had her daughter been present to hear this undoubted confirmation of her theory. Yet she felt a little nervous and uncomfortable even on this threshold of discovery.

"Is she here now?"

"She 's in Tuolumne," said Seventy-Four.

"A little better looked arter than formerly," added Seventy-Five.

"I see. Then Mr. Silsbee *enticed* her away?"

"Well, ma'am, it *was* allowed as she runned away. But it was n't proved, and it generally was n't her style."

Mrs. Rightbody trifled with her next question. "She was pretty, of course?"

The eyes of both men brightened.

"She was *that!*" said Seventy-Four emphatically.

"It would have done you good to see her," added Seventy-Five.

Mrs. Rightbody inwardly doubted it; but before she could ask another question, the two men again retired to the corner for consultation. When they came back there was a shade more of kindliness and confidence in their manner, and Seventy-Four opened his mind more freely.

"We wish to say, ma'am, looking at the thing, by and large, in a fa'r-minded way — that ez *you* seem interested, and ez Mr. Rightbody was interested, and was according to all accounts de-ceived and led away by Silsbee, that we don't mind listening to any proposition *you* might make, as a lady — allowin' you was ekally interested."

"I understand," said Mrs. Rightbody quickly. "And you will furnish me with any papers."

The two men again consulted.

"We wish to say, ma'am, that we think she's got papers, but" —

"I *must* have them, you understand," interrupted Mrs. Rightbody, "at any price!"

"We was about to say, ma'am," said Seventy-Five slowly, "that, considerin' all things — and you being a lady — you kin have *her*, papers, pedigree, and guarantee for twelve hundred dollars!"

It has been alleged that Mrs. Rightbody asked only one question more, and then fainted. It is known, however,

that by the next day it was understood in Deadwood that Mrs. Rightbody had confessed to the Vigilance Committee that her husband, a celebrated Boston millionaire, anxious to gain possession of Abner Springer's well-known sorrel mare, had incited the unfortunate Josh Silsbee to steal it; and that finally, failing in this, the widow of the deceased Boston millionaire was now in personal negotiation with the owners.

Howbeit, Miss Alice, returning home that afternoon, found her mother with a violent headache.

"We will leave here by the next steamer," said Mrs. Rightbody languidly. "Mr. Ryder has promised to accompany us."

"But, mother" —

"The climate, Alice, is overrated. My nerves are already suffering from it. The associations are unfit for you, and Mr. Marvin is naturally impatient."

Miss Alice colored slightly.

"But your quest, mother?"

"I've abandoned it."

"But *I* have not," said Alice quietly. "Do you remember my guide at the Yosemite, Stanislaus Joe? Well, Stanislaus Joe is — who do you think?"

Mrs. Rightbody was languidly indifferent.

"Well, Stanislaus Joe is the son of Joshua Silsbee."

Mrs. Rightbody sat upright in astonishment.

"Yes; but, mother, he knows nothing of what we know. His father treated him shamefully, and set him cruelly adrift years ago; and when he was hung, the poor fellow, in sheer disgrace, changed his name."

"But if he knows nothing of his father's compact, of what interest is this?"

"Oh, nothing! Only I thought it might lead to something."

Mrs. Rightbody suspected that "something," and asked

sharply, "And pray how did *you* find it out? You did not speak of it in the valley."

"Oh, I did n't find it out till to-day," said Miss Alice, walking to the window. "He happened to be here, and — told me."

PART IV

If Mrs. Rightbody's friends had been astounded by her singular and unexpected pilgrimage to California so soon after her husband's decease, they were still more astounded by the information a year later that she was engaged to be married to a Mr. Ryder, of whom only the scant history was known that he was a Californian, and former correspondent of her husband. It was undeniable that the man was wealthy, and evidently no mere adventurer; it was rumored that he was courageous and manly; but even those who delighted in his odd humor were shocked at his grammar and slang. It was said that Mr. Marvin had but one interview with his father-in-law elect, and returned so supremely disgusted that the match was broken off. The horse-stealing story, more or less garbled, found its way through lips that pretended to decry it, yet eagerly repeated it. Only one member of the Rightbody family — and a new one — saved them from utter ostracism. It was young Mr. Ryder, the adopted son of the prospective head of the household, whose culture, manners, and general elegance fascinated and thrilled Boston with a new sensation. It seemed to many that Miss Alice would in the vicinity of this rare exotic forget her former enthusiasm for a professional life; but the young man was pitied by society, and various plans for diverting him from any mésalliance with the Rightbody family were concocted.

It was a wintry night, and the second anniversary of Mr. Rightbody's death, that a light was burning in his

library. But the dead man's chair was occupied by young Mr. Ryder, adopted son of the new proprietor of the mansion, and before him stood Alice, with her dark eyes fixed on the table.

"There must have been something in it, Joe, believe me. Did you never hear your father speak of mine?"

"Never."

"But you say he was college bred, and born a gentleman, and in his youth he must have had many friends."

"Alice," said the young man gravely, "when I have done something to redeem my name, and wear it again before these people, before *you*, it would be well to revive the past. But till then" —

But Alice was not to be put down. "I remember," she went on, scarcely heeding him, "that when I came in that night, papa was reading a letter, and seemed to be disconcerted."

"A letter?"

"Yes; but," added Alice, with a sigh, "when we found him here insensible, there was no letter on his person. He must have destroyed it."

"Did you ever look among his papers? If found, it might be a clue."

The young man glanced toward the cabinet. Alice read his eyes, and answered, —

"Oh dear, no. The cabinet contained only his papers, all perfectly arranged, — you know how methodical were his habits, — and some old business and private letters, all carefully put away."

"Let us see them," said the young man, rising.

They opened drawer after drawer; files upon files of letters and business papers, accurately folded and filed. Suddenly Alice uttered a little cry, and picked up a quaint ivory paper-knife lying at the bottom of a drawer.

"It was missing the next day, and never could be found.

He must have mislaid it here. This is the drawer," said Alice eagerly.

Here was a clue. But the lower part of the drawer was filled with old letters, not labeled, yet neatly arranged in files. Suddenly Joe stopped, and said, "Put them back, Alice, at once."

"Why?"

"Some of these letters are in my father's handwriting."

"The more reason why *I* should see them," said the girl imperatively. "Here, you take part and I'll take part, and we'll get through quicker."

There was a certain decision and independence in her manner which he had learned to respect. He took the letters, and in silence read them with her. They were old college letters, so filled with boyish dreams, ambitions, aspirations, and Utopian theories, that I fear neither of these young people even recognized their parents in the dead ashes of the past. They were both grave, until Alice uttered a little hysterical cry, and dropped her face in her hands. Joe was instantly beside her.

"It's nothing, Joe, nothing. Don't read it, please; please, don't. It's so funny — it's so very queer."

But Joe had, after a slight, half-playful struggle, taken the letter from the girl. Then he read aloud the words written by his father thirty years ago.

"I thank you, dear friend, for all you say about my wife and boy. I thank you for reminding me of our boyish compact. He will be ready to fulfill it, I know, if he loves those his father loves, even if you should marry years later. I am glad for your sake, for both our sakes, that it is a boy. Heaven send you a good wife, dear Adams, and a daughter, to make my son equally happy."

Joe Silsbee looked down, took the half-laughing, half-tearful face in his hands, kissed her forehead, and, with tears in his grave eyes, said, "Amen!"

. . . . . .

I am inclined to think that this sentiment was echoed heartily by Mrs. Rightbody's former acquaintances, when, a year later, Miss Alice was united to a professional gentleman of honor and renown, yet who was known to be the son of a convicted horse-thief. A few remembered the previous Californian story, and found corroboration therefor; but a majority believed it a just reward to Miss Alice for her conduct to Mr. Marvin, and as Miss Alice cheerfully accepted it in that light, I do not see why I may not end my story with happiness to all concerned.

FLIP: A CALIFORNIA ROMANCE

CHAPTER I

JUST where the red track of the Los Gatos road streams on and upward like the sinuous trail of a fiery rocket, until it is extinguished in the blue shadows of the Coast Range, there is an embayed terrace near the summit, hedged by dwarf firs. At every bend of the heat-laden road the eye rested upon it wistfully; all along the flank of the mountain, which seemed to pant and quiver in the oven-like air, through rising dust, the slow creaking of dragging wheels, the monotonous cry of tired springs, and the muffled beat of plunging hoofs, it held out a promise of sheltered coolness and green silences beyond. Sunburned and anxious faces yearned toward it from the dizzy, swaying tops of stage-coaches, from lagging teams far below, from the blinding white canvas covers of "mountain schooners," and from scorching saddles that seemed to weigh down the scrambling, sweating animals beneath. But it would seem that the hope was vain, the promise illusive.

When the terrace was reached it appeared not only to have caught and gathered all the heat of the valley below, but to have evolved a fire of its own from some hidden crater-like source unknown. Nevertheless, instead of prostrating and enervating man and beast, it was said to have induced the wildest exaltation. The heated air was filled and stifling with resinous exhalations. The delirious spices of balm, bay, spruce, juniper, yerba buena, wild syringa, and strange aromatic herbs as yet unclassified, distilled

and evaporated in that mighty heat, and seemed to fire with a midsummer madness all who breathed their fumes. They stung, smarted, stimulated, intoxicated.

It was said that the most jaded and footsore horses became furious and ungovernable under their influence; wearied teamsters and muleteers, who had exhausted their profanity in the ascent, drank fresh draughts of inspiration in this fiery air, extended their vocabulary, and created new and startling forms of objurgation. It is recorded that one bibulous stage-driver exhausted description and condensed its virtues in a single phrase: "Gin and ginger." This felicitous epithet, flung out in a generous comparison with his favorite drink, "rum and gum," clung to it ever after.

Such was the current comment on this vale of spices. Like most human criticism it was hasty and superficial. No one yet had been known to have penetrated deeply its mysterious recesses. It was still far below the summit and its wayside inn. It had escaped the intruding foot of hunter and prospector; and the inquisitive patrol of the county surveyor had only skirted its boundary.

It remained for Mr. Lance Harriott to complete its exploration. His reasons for so doing were simple. He had made the journey thither underneath the stage-coach, and clinging to its axle. He had chosen this hazardous mode of conveyance at night, as the coach crept by his place of concealment in the wayside brush, to elude the sheriff of Monterey County and his posse, who were after him. He had not made himself known to his fellow passengers, as they already knew him as a gambler, an outlaw, and a desperado; he deemed it unwise to present himself in his newer reputation of a man who had just slain a brother gambler in a quarrel, and for whom a reward was offered. He slipped from the axle as the stage-coach swirled past the brushing branches of fir, and for an instant lay un-

noticed, a scarcely distinguishable mound of dust in the broken furrows of the road. Then, more like a beast than a man, he crept on his hands and knees into the steaming underbrush.

Here he lay still until the clatter of harness and the sound of voices faded in the distance. Had he been followed, it would have been difficult to detect in that inert mass of rags any semblance to a known form or figure. A hideous reddish mask of dust and clay obliterated his face; his hands were shapeless stumps exaggerated in his trailing sleeves. And when he rose, staggering like a drunken man, and plunged wildly into the recesses of the wood, a cloud of dust followed him, and pieces and patches of his frayed and rotten garments clung to the impeding branches. Twice he fell, but, maddened and upheld by the smarting spices and stimulating aroma of the air, he kept on his course.

Gradually the heat became less oppressive; once, when he stopped and leaned exhaustedly against a sapling, he fancied he saw the zephyr he could not yet feel in the glittering and trembling of leaves in the distance before him. Again the deep stillness was moved with a faint sighing rustle, and he knew he must be nearing the edge of the thicket. The spell of silence thus broken was followed by a fainter, more musical interruption — the glassy tinkle of water! A step further his foot trembled on the verge of a slight ravine, still closely canopied by the interlacing boughs overhead.

A tiny stream that he could have dammed with his hand yet lingered in this parched red gash in the hillside and trickled into a deep, irregular, well-like cavity, that again overflowed and sent its slight surplus on. It had been the luxurious retreat of many a spotted trout; it was to be the bath of Lance Harriott. Without a moment's hesitation, without removing a single garment, he slipped

cautiously into it, as if fearful of losing a single drop. His head disappeared from the level of the bank; the solitude was again unbroken. Only two objects remained upon the edge of the ravine, — his revolver and tobacco pouch.

A few minutes elapsed. A fearless blue-jay alighted on the bank and made a prospecting peck at the tobacco pouch. It yielded in favor of a gopher, who endeavored to draw it toward his hole, but in turn gave way to a red squirrel, whose attention was divided, however, between the pouch and the revolver, which he regarded with mischievous fascination. Then there was a splash, a grunt, a sudden dispersion of animated nature, and the head of Mr. Lance Harriott appeared above the bank. It was a startling transformation. Not only that he had, by this wholesale process, washed himself and his light "drill" garments entirely clean, but that he had, apparently by the same operation, morally cleansed *himself*, and left every stain and ugly blot of his late misdeeds and reputation in his bath. His face, albeit scratched here and there, was rosy, round, shining with irrepressible good humor and youthful levity. His large blue eyes were infantine in their innocent surprise and thoughtlessness. Dripping yet with water, and panting, he rested his elbows lazily on the bank, and became instantly absorbed with a boy's delight in the movements of the gopher, who, after the first alarm, returned cautiously to abduct the tobacco pouch. If any familiar had failed to detect Lance Harriott in this hideous masquerade of dust and grime and tatters, still less would any passing stranger have recognized in this blonde faun the possible outcast and murderer. And when with a swirl of his spattering sleeve he drove back the gopher in a shower of spray, and leaped to the bank, he seemed to have accepted his felonious hiding-place as a mere picnicking bower.

A slight breeze was unmistakably permeating the wood from the west. Looking in that direction, Lance imagined

that the shadow was less dark, and although the undergrowth was denser, he struck off carelessly toward it. As he went on, the wood became lighter and lighter; branches, and presently leaves, were painted against the vivid blue of the sky. He knew he must be near the summit, stopped, felt for his revolver, and then lightly put the few remaining branches aside.

The full glare of the noonday sun at first blinded him. When he could see more clearly, he found himself on the open western slope of the mountain, which in the Coast Range was seldom wooded. The spiced thicket stretched between him and the summit, and again between him and the stage road that plunges from the terrace, like forked lightning into the valley below. He could command all the approaches without being seen. Not that this seemed to occupy his thoughts or cause him any anxiety. His first act was to disencumber himself of his tattered coat; he then filled and lighted his pipe, and stretched himself full-length on the open hillside, as if to bleach in the fierce sun. While smoking he carelessly perused the fragment of a newspaper which had enveloped his tobacco, and being struck with some amusing paragraph, read it half aloud again to some imaginary auditor, emphasizing its humor with an hilarious slap upon his leg.

Possibly from the relaxation of fatigue and the bath, which had become a vapor one as he alternately rolled and dried himself in the baking grass, his eyes closed dreamily. He was awakened by the sound of voices. They were distant; they were vague; they approached no nearer. He rolled himself to the verge of the first precipitous grassy descent. There was another bank or plateau below him, and then a confused depth of olive shadows, pierced here and there by the spiked helmets of pines. There was no trace of habitation, yet the voices were those of some monotonous occupation, and Lance distinctly heard

through them the click of crockery and the ring of some household utensil. It appeared to be the interjectional, half-listless, half-perfunctory, domestic dialogue of an old man and a girl, of which the words were unintelligible. Their voices indicated the solitude of the mountain, but without sadness; they were mysterious without being awe-inspiring. They might have uttered the dreariest commonplaces, but in their vast isolation they seemed musical and eloquent. Lance drew his first sigh, — they had suggested dinner.

Careless as his nature was, he was too cautious to risk detection in broad daylight. He contented himself for the present with endeavoring to locate that particular part of the depths from which the voices seemed to rise. It was more difficult, however, to select some other way of penetrating it than by the stage road. "They 're bound to have a fire or show a light when it 's dark," he reasoned, and, satisfied with that reflection, lay down again. Presently he began to amuse himself by tossing some silver coins in the air. Then his attention was directed to a spur of the Coast Range which had been sharply silhouetted against the cloudless western sky. Something intensely white, something so small that it was scarcely larger than the silver coin in his hand, was appearing in a slight cleft of the range.

While he looked it gradually filled and obliterated the cleft. In another moment the whole serrated line of mountain had disappeared. The dense, dazzling white, encompassing host began to pour over and down every ravine and pass of the coast. Lance recognized the sea-fog, and knew that scarcely twenty miles away lay the ocean — and safety! The drooping sun was now caught and hidden in its soft embraces. A sudden chill breathed over the mountain. He shivered, rose, and plunged again for very warmth into the spice-laden thicket. The heated

balsamic air began to affect him like a powerful sedative: his hunger was forgotten in the languor of fatigue; he slumbered. When he awoke it was dark. He groped his way through the thicket. A few stars were shining directly above him, but beyond and below, everything was lost in the soft, white, fleecy veil of fog. Whatever light or fire might have betokened human habitation was hidden. To push on blindly would be madness; he could only wait for morning. It suited the outcast's lazy philosophy. He crept back again to his bed in the hollow, and slept. In that profound silence and shadow, shut out from human association and sympathy by the ghostly fog, what torturing visions conjured up by remorse and fear should have pursued him? What spirit passed before him, or slowly shaped itself out of the infinite blackness of the wood? None. As he slipped gently into that blackness he remembered, with a slight regret, some biscuits that were dropped from the coach by a careless luncheon-consuming passenger. That pang over, he slept as sweetly, as profoundly, as divinely, as a child.

CHAPTER II

He awoke with the aroma of the woods still steeping his senses. His first instinct was that of all young animals: he seized a few of the young, tender green leaves of the yerba buena vine that crept over his mossy pillow, and ate them, being rewarded by a half berry-like flavor that seemed to soothe the cravings of his appetite. The languor of sleep being still upon him, he lazily watched the quivering of a sunbeam that was caught in the canopying boughs above. Then he dozed again. Hovering between sleeping and waking, he became conscious of a slight movement among the dead leaves on the bank beside the hollow in which he lay. The movement appeared to be intelligent, and directed toward his revolver, which glittered on the bank. Amused at this evident return of his larcenious friend of the previous day, he lay perfectly still. The movement and rustle continued, and it now seemed long and undulating. Lance's eyes suddenly became set; he was intensely, keenly awake. It was not a snake, but the hand of a human arm, half hidden in the moss, groping for the weapon. In that flash of perception he saw that it was small, bare, and deeply freckled. In an instant he grasped it firmly, and rose to his feet, dragging to his own level as he did so, the struggling figure of a young girl.

"Leave me go!" she said, more ashamed than frightened.

Lance looked at her. She was scarcely more than fifteen, slight and lithe, with a boyish flatness of breast and back. Her flushed face and bare throat were abso-

lutely peppered with minute brown freckles, like grains of spent gunpowder. Her eyes, which were large and gray, presented the singular spectacle of being also freckled, — at least they were shot through in pupil and cornea with tiny spots like powdered allspice. Her hair was even more remarkable in its tawny deerskin color, full of lighter shades, and bleached to the faintest of blondes on the crown of her head, as if by the action of the sun. She had evidently outgrown her dress, which was made for a smaller child, and the too brief skirt disclosed a bare, freckled, and sandy desert of shapely limb, for which the darned stockings were equally too scant. Lance let his grasp slip from her thin wrist to her hand, and then with a good-humored gesture tossed it lightly back to her.

She did not retreat, but continued looking at him in a half-surly embarrassment.

"I ain't a bit frightened," she said; "I'm not going to run away, — don't you fear."

"Glad to hear it," said Lance, with unmistakable satisfaction, "but why did you go for my revolver?"

She flushed again, and was silent. Presently she began to kick the earth at the roots of the tree, and said, as if confidentially to her foot: —

"I wanted to get hold of it before you did."

"You did? — and why?"

"Oh, you know why."

Every tooth in Lance's head showed that he did, perfectly. But he was discreetly silent.

"I did n't know what you were hiding there for," she went on, still addressing the tree, "and," looking at him sideways under her white lashes, "I did n't see your face."

This subtle compliment was the first suggestion of her artful sex. It actually sent the blood into the careless rascal's face, and for a moment confused him. He coughed.

"So you thought you'd freeze on to that six-shooter of mine until you saw my hand?"

She nodded. Then she picked up a broken hazel branch, fitted it into the small of her back, threw her tanned bare arms over the ends of it, and expanded her chest and her biceps at the same moment. This simple action was supposed to convey an impression at once of ease and muscular force.

"Perhaps you'd like to take it now," said Lance, handing her the pistol.

"I've seen six-shooters before now," said the girl, evading the proffered weapon and its suggestion. "Dad has one, and my brother had two derringers before he was half as big as me."

She stopped to observe in her companion the effect of this capacity of her family to bear arms. Lance only regarded her amusedly. Presently she again spoke abruptly:

"What made you eat that grass, just now?"

"Grass!" echoed Lance.

"Yes, there," pointing to the yerba buena.

Lance laughed. "I was hungry. Look!" he said, gayly tossing some silver into the air. "Do you think you could get me some breakfast for that, and have enough left to buy something for yourself?"

The girl eyed the money and the man with half-bashful curiosity.

"I reckon dad might give ye suthing if he had a mind ter, though ez a rule he 's down on tramps ever since they run off his chickens. Ye might try."

"But I want *you* to try. You can bring it to me here."

The girl retreated a step, dropped her eyes, and, with a smile that was a charming hesitation between bashfulness and impudence, said: "So you *are* hidin', are ye?"

"That's just it. Your head's level. I am," laughed Lance unconcernedly.

"Yur ain't one o' the McCarthy gang — are ye?"

Mr. Lance Harriott felt a momentary moral exaltation in declaring truthfully that he was not one of a notorious band of mountain freebooters known in the district under that name.

"Nor ye ain't one of them chicken-lifters that raided Henderson's ranch? We don't go much on that kind o' cattle yer."

"No," said Lance cheerfully.

"Nor ye ain't that chap ez beat his wife unto death at Santa Clara?"

Lance honestly scorned the imputation. Such conjugal ill treatment as he had indulged in had not been physical, and had been with other men's wives.

There was a moment's further hesitation on the part of the girl. Then she said shortly: —

"Well, then, I reckon you kin come along with me."

"Where?" asked Lance.

"To the ranch," she replied simply.

"Then you won't bring me anything to eat here?"

"What for? You kin get it down there." Lance hesitated. "I tell you it's all right," she continued. "I'll make it all right with dad."

"But suppose I reckon I'd rather stay here," persisted Lance, with a perfect consciousness, however, of affectation in his caution.

"Stay away then," said the girl coolly; "only as dad perempted this yer woods" —

"*Pre*-empted," suggested Lance.

"Per-empted or pre-emp-ted, as you like," continued the girl scornfully, — "ez he's got a holt on this yer woods, ye might ez well see him down thar ez here. For here he's like to come any minit. You can bet your life on that."

She must have read Lance's amusement in his eyes, for

she again dropped her own with a frown of brusque embarrassment. "Come along, then; I'm your man," said Lance gayly, extending his hand.

She would not accept it, eying it, however, furtively, like a horse about to shy. "Hand me your pistol first," she said.

He handed it to her with an assumption of gayety. She received it on her part with unfeigned seriousness, and threw it over her shoulder like a gun. This combined action of the child and heroine, it is quite unnecessary to say, afforded Lance undiluted joy.

"You go first," she said.

Lance stepped promptly out, with a broad grin. "Looks kinder as if I was a pris'ner, don't it?" he suggested.

"Go on, and don't fool," she replied.

The two fared onward through the wood. For one moment he entertained the facetious idea of appearing to rush frantically away, "just to see what the girl would do," but abandoned it. "It's an even thing if she would n't spot me the first pop," he reflected admiringly.

When they had reached the open hillside, Lance stopped inquiringly. "This way," she said, pointing toward the summit, and in quite an opposite direction to the valley where he had heard the voices, one of which he now recognized as hers. They skirted the thicket for a few moments, and then turned sharply into a trail which began to dip toward a ravine leading to the valley.

"Why do you have to go all the way round?" he asked.

"*We* don't," the girl replied with emphasis; "there's a shorter cut."

"Where?"

"That's telling," she answered shortly.

"What's your name?" asked Lance, after a steep scramble and a drop into the ravine.

"Flip."

"What?"

"Flip."

"I mean your first name, — your front name."

"Flip."

"Flip! Oh, short for Felipa!"

"It ain't Flipper, — it 's Flip." And she relapsed into silence.

"You don't ask me mine?" suggested Lance.

She did not vouchsafe a reply.

"Then you don't want to know?"

"Maybe dad will. You can lie to *him*."

This direct answer apparently sustained the agreeable homicide for some moments. He moved onward, silently exuding admiration.

"Only," added Flip, with a sudden caution, "you 'd better agree with me."

The trail here turned again abruptly and reëntered the cañon. Lance looked up, and noticed they were almost directly beneath the bay thicket and the plateau that towered far above them. The trail here showed signs of clearing, and the way was marked by felled trees and stumps of pines.

"What does your father do here?" he finally asked. Flip remained silent, swinging the revolver. Lance repeated his question.

"Burns charcoal and makes diamonds," said Flip, looking at him from the corners of her eyes.

"Makes diamonds?" echoed Lance.

Flip nodded her head.

"Many of 'em?" he continued carelessly.

"Lots. But they 're not big," she returned, with a sidelong glance.

"Oh, they 're not big?" said Lance gravely.

They had by this time reached a small staked inclosure,

whence the sudden fluttering and cackle of poultry welcomed the return of the evident mistress of this sylvan retreat. It was scarcely imposing. Further on, a cooking-stove under a tree, a saddle and bridle, a few household implements scattered about, indicated the "ranch." Like most pioneer clearings, it was simply a disorganized raid upon nature that had left behind a desolate battlefield strewn with waste and decay. The fallen trees, the crushed thicket, the splintered limbs, the rudely torn-up soil, were made hideous by their grotesque juxtaposition with the wrecked fragments of civilization, in empty cans, broken bottles, battered hats, soleless boots, frayed stockings, cast-off rags, and the crowning absurdity of the twisted-wire skeleton of a hooped skirt hanging from a branch. The wildest defile, the densest thicket, the most virgin solitude, was less dreary and forlorn than this first footprint of man. The only redeeming feature of this prolonged bivouac was the cabin itself. Built of the half-cylindrical strips of pine bark, and thatched with the same material, it had a certain picturesque rusticity. But this was an accident of economy rather than taste, for which Flip apologized by saying that the bark of the pine was "no good" for charcoal.

"I reckon dad's in the woods," she added, pausing before the open door of the cabin. "Oh, dad!" Her voice, clear and high, seemed to fill the whole long cañon, and echoed from the green plateau above. The monotonous strokes of an axe were suddenly intermitted, and somewhere from the depths of the close-set pines a voice answered "Flip." There was a pause of a few moments, with some muttering, stumbling, and crackling in the underbrush, and then the appearance of "dad."

Had Lance first met him in the thicket, he would have been puzzled to assign his race to Mongolian, Indian, or Ethiopian origin. Perfunctory but incomplete washings of his hands and face, after charcoal burning, had gradu-

ally ground into his skin a grayish slate-pencil pallor, grotesquely relieved at the edges, where the washing had left off, with a border of a darker color. He looked like an overworked Christy minstrel with the briefest of intervals between his performances. There were black rims in the orbits of his eyes, as if he gazed feebly out of unglazed spectacles, which heightened his simian resemblance, already grotesquely exaggerated by what appeared to be repeated and spasmodic experiments in dyeing his gray hair. Without the slightest notice of Lance, he inflicted his protesting and querulous presence entirely on his daughter.

"Well! what 's up now? Yer ye are calling me from work an hour before noon. Dog my skin, ef I ever get fairly limbered up afore it 's 'Dad!' and 'Oh, dad.'"

To Lance's intense satisfaction the girl received this harangue with an air of supreme indifference, and when "dad" had relapsed into an unintelligible, and, as it seemed to Lance, a half-frightened muttering, she said coolly, —

"Ye 'd better drop that axe and scoot round gettin' this stranger some breakfast and some grub to take with him. He 's one of them San Francisco sports out here trout-fishing in the branch. He 's got adrift from his party, has lost his rod and fixin's, and had to camp out last night in the Gin and Ginger Woods."

"That 's just it; it 's allers suthin' like that," screamed the old man, dashing his fist on his leg in a feeble, impotent passion, but without looking at Lance. "Why in blazes don't he go up to that there blamed hotel on the summit? Why in thunder" — But here he caught his daughter's large, freckled eyes full in his own. He blinked feebly, his voice fell into a tone of whining entreaty. "Now, look yer, Flip, it 's playing it rather low down on the old man, this yer running in o' tramps and desarted

emigrants and cast-ashore sailors and forlorn widders and ravin' lunatics, on this yer ranch. I put it to you, mister," he said abruptly, turning to Lance for the first time, but as if he had already taken an active part in the conversation, — "I put it as a gentleman yourself, and a fair-minded sportin' man, if this is the square thing?"

Before Lance could reply, Flip had already begun. "That 's just it! D' ye reckon, being a sportin' man and a A 1 feller, he 's goin' to waltz down inter that hotel, rigged out ez he is? D' ye reckon he 's goin' to let his partners get the laugh onter him? D' ye reckon he 's goin' to show his head outer this yer ranch till he can do it square? Not much! Go 'long. Dad, you 're talking silly!"

The old man weakened. He feebly trailed his axe between his legs to a stump and sat down, wiping his forehead with his sleeve, and imparting to it the appearance of a slate with a difficult sum partly rubbed out. He looked despairingly at Lance. "In course," he said, with a deep sigh, "you naturally ain't got any money. In course you left your pocketbook, containing fifty dollars, under a stone, and can't find it. In course," he continued, as he observed Lance put his hand to his pocket, "you 've only got a blank check on Wells, Fargo & Co. for a hundred dollars, and you 'd like me to give you the difference?"

Amused as Lance evidently was at this, his absolute admiration for Flip absorbed everything else. With his eyes fixed upon the girl, he briefly assured the old man that he would pay for everything he wanted. He did this with a manner quite different from the careless, easy attitude he had assumed toward Flip; at least the quick-witted girl noticed it, and wondered if he was angry. It was quite true that ever since his eye had fallen upon another of his own sex, its glance had been less frank and careless. Certain traits of possible impatience, which might develop into

manslaying, were coming to the fore. Yet a word or a gesture of Flip's was sufficient to change that manner; and when, with the fretful assistance of her father, she had prepared a somewhat sketchy and primitive repast, he questioned the old man about diamond-making. The eye of dad kindled.

"I want ter know how ye knew I was making diamonds," he asked, with a certain bashful pettishness not unlike his daughter's.

"Heard it in 'Frisco," replied Lance, with glib mendacity, glancing at the girl.

"I reckon they 're gettin' sort of skeert down there — them jewelers," chuckled dad; "yet it 's in nater that their figgers will have to come down. It 's only a question of the price of charcoal. I suppose they did n't tell you how I made the discovery?"

Lance would have stopped the old man's narrative by saying that he knew the story, but he wished to see how far Flip lent herself to her father's delusion.

"Ye see, one night about two years ago I had a pit o' charcoal burning out there, and tho' it had been a-smouldering and a-smoking and a-blazing for nigh on to a month, somehow it did n't charcoal worth a cent. And yet, dog my skin, but the heat o' that er pit was suthin' hidyus and frightful; ye could n't stand within a hundred yards of it, and they could feel it on the stage road three miles over yon, t' other side the mountain. There was nights when me and Flip had to take our blankets up the ravine and camp out all night, and the back of this yer hut shriveled up like that bacon. It was about as nigh on to hell as any sample ye kin get here. Now, mebbe you think I built that air fire? Mebbe you 'll allow the heat was just the nat'ral burning of that pit?"

"Certainly," said Lance, trying to see Flip's eyes, which were resolutely averted.

"Thet 's whar you 'd be lyin'! That yar heat kem out of the bowels of the yearth, — kem up like out of a chimbley or a blast, and kep' up that yar fire. And when she cools down a month after, and I got to strip her, there was a hole in the yearth, and a spring o' bilin', scaldin' water pourin' out of it ez big as your waist. And right in the middle of it was this yer." He rose with the instinct of a skillful raconteur, and whisked from under his bunk a chamois leather bag, which he emptied on the table before them.

It contained a small fragment of native rock crystal, half-fused upon a petrified bit of pine. It was so glaringly truthful, so really what it purported to be, that the most unscientific woodman or pioneer would have understood it at a glance. Lance raised his mirthful eyes to Flip.

"It was cooled suddint, — stunted by the water," said the girl eagerly. She stopped, and as abruptly turned away her eyes and her reddened face.

"That 's it,— that 's just it," continued the old man. "Thar 's Flip, thar, knows it; she ain't no fool!" Lance did not speak, but turned a hard, unsympathizing look upon the old man, and rose almost roughly. The old man clutched his coat. "That 's it, ye see. The carbon 's just turning to di'mens. And stunted. And why? 'Cos the heat was n't kep' up long enough. Mebbe yer think I stopped thar? That ain't me. Thar 's a pit out yar in the woods ez hez been burning six months; it hain't, in course, got the advantages o' the old one, for it 's nat'ral heat. But I 'm keeping that heat up. I 've got a hole where I kin watch it every four hours. When the time comes, I 'm thar! Don't you see? That 's me! that 's David Fairley, — that 's the old man, — you bet!"

"That 's so," said Lance curtly. "And now, Mr. Fairley, if you 'll hand me over a coat or jacket till I can get past these fogs on the Monterey road, I won't keep you

from your diamond pit." He threw down a handful of silver on the table.

"Ther 's a deerskin jacket yer," said the old man, "that one o' them vaqueros left for the price of a bottle of whiskey."

"I reckon it would n't suit the stranger," said Flip, dubiously producing a much-worn, slashed, and braided vaquero's jacket. But it did suit Lance, who found it warm, and also had suddenly found a certain satisfaction in opposing Flip. When he had put it on, and nodded coldly to the old man, and carelessly to Flip, he walked to the door.

"If you 're going to take the Monterey road, I can show you a short cut to it," said Flip, with a certain kind of shy civility.

The paternal Fairley groaned. "That 's it; let the chickens and the ranch go to thunder, as long as there 's a stranger to trapse round with; go on!"

Lance would have made some savage reply, but Flip interrupted. "You know yourself, dad, it 's a blind trail, and as that 'ere constable that kem out here hunting French Pete, could n't find it, and had to go round by the cañon, like ez not the stranger would lose his way, and have to come back!" This dangerous prospect silenced the old man, and Flip and Lance stepped into the road together. They walked on for some moments without speaking. Suddenly Lance turned upon his companion.

"You did n't swallow all that rot about the diamond, did you?" he asked crossly.

Flip ran a little ahead, as if to avoid a reply.

"You don't mean to say that 's the sort of hog wash the old man serves out to you regularly?" continued Lance, becoming more slangy in his ill temper.

"I don't know that it 's any consarn o' yours what I think," replied Flip, hopping from boulder to boulder, as they crossed the bed of a dry watercourse.

"And I suppose you've piloted round and dry-nussed every tramp and dead-beat you've met since you came here," continued Lance, with unmistakable ill humor. "How many have you helped over this road?"

"It's a year since there was a Chinaman chased by some Irishmen from the crossing into the brush about yer, and he was too afeered to come out, and nigh most starved to death in thar. I had to drag him out and start him on the mountain, for you could n't get him back to the road. He was the last one but *you*."

"Do you reckon it's the right thing for a girl like you to run about with trash of this kind, and mix herself up with all sorts of roughs and bad company?" said Lance.

Flip stopped short. "Look! if you're goin' to talk like dad, I'll go back."

The ridiculousness of such a resemblance struck him more keenly than a consciousness of his own ingratitude. He hastened to assure Flip that he was joking. When he had made his peace they fell into talk again, Lance becoming unselfish enough to inquire into one or two facts concerning her life which did not immediately affect him. Her mother had died on the plains when she was a baby, and her brother had run away from home at twelve. She fully expected to see him again, and thought he might some time stray into their cañon. "That is why, then, you take so much stock in tramps," said Lance. "You expect to recognize *him?*"

"Well," replied Flip gravely "there is suthing in *that*, and there's suthing in *this:* some o' these chaps might run across brother and do him a good turn for the sake of me."

"Like me, for instance?" suggested Lance.

"Like you. You'd do him a good turn, would n't you?"

"You bet!" said Lance, with a sudden emotion that

quite startled him; "only don't you go to throwing yourself round promiscuously." He was half conscious of an irritating sense of jealousy, as he asked if any of her protégés had ever returned.

"No," said Flip, "no one ever did. It shows," she added with sublime simplicity, "I had done 'em good, and they could get on alone. Don't it?"

"It does," responded Lance grimly. "Have you any other friends that come?"

"Only the Postmaster at the Crossing."

"The Postmaster?"

"Yes; he 's reckonin' to marry me next year, if I 'm big enough."

"And what do you reckon?" asked Lance earnestly.

Flip began a series of distortions with her shoulders, ran on ahead, picked up a few pebbles and threw them into the wood, glanced back at Lance with swimming mottled eyes, that seemed a piquant incarnation of everything suggestive and tantalizing, and said: —

"That 's telling."

They had by this time reached the spot where they were to separate. "Look," said Flip, pointing to a faint deflection of their path, which seemed, however, to lose itself in the underbrush a dozen yards away; "ther 's your trail. It gets plainer and broader the further you get on, but you must use your eyes here, and get to know it well afore you get into the fog. Good-by."

"Good-by." Lance took her hand and drew her beside him. She was still redolent of the spices of the thicket, and to the young man's excited fancy seemed at that moment to personify the perfume and intoxication of her native woods. Half laughingly, half earnestly, he tried to kiss her; she struggled for some time strongly, but at the last moment yielded, with a slight return and the exchange of a subtle fire that thrilled him, and left him standing con-

fused and astounded as she ran away. He watched her lithe, nymph-like figure disappear in the checkered shadows of the wood, and then he turned briskly down the half-hidden trail. His eyesight was keen, he made good progress, and was soon well on his way toward the distant ridge.

But Flip's return had not been as rapid. When she reached the wood she crept to its beetling verge, and looking across the cañon watched Lance's figure as it vanished and reappeared in the shadows and sinuosities of the ascent. When he reached the ridge the outlying fog crept across the summit, caught him in its embrace, and wrapped him from her gaze. Flip sighed, raised herself, put her alternate foot on a stump, and took a long pull at her too-brief stockings. When she had pulled down her skirt and endeavored once more to renew the intimacy that had existed in previous years between the edge of her petticoat and the top of her stockings, she sighed again, and went home.

CHAPTER III

For six months the sea fogs monotonously came and went along the Monterey coast; for six months they beleaguered the Coast Range with afternoon sorties of white hosts that regularly swept over the mountain crest, and were as regularly beaten back again by the leveled lances of the morning sun. For six months that white veil which had once hidden Lance Harriott in its folds returned without him. For that amiable outlaw no longer needed disguise or hiding-place. The swift wave of pursuit that had dashed him on the summit had fallen back, and the next day was broken and scattered. Before the week had passed, a regular judicial inquiry relieved his crime of premeditation, and showed it to be a rude duel of two armed and equally desperate men. From a secure vantage in a seacoast town Lance challenged a trial by his peers, and, as an already prejudged man escaping from his executioners, obtained a change of venue. Regular justice, seated by the calm Pacific, found the action of an interior, irregular jury rash and hasty. Lance was liberated on bail.

The Postmaster at Fisher's Crossing had just received the weekly mail and express from San Francisco, and was engaged in examining it. It consisted of five letters and two parcels. Of these, three of the letters and the two parcels were directed to Flip. It was not the first time during the last six months that this extraordinary event had occurred, and the curiosity of the Crossing was duly excited. As Flip had never called personally for the letters or parcels, but had sent one of her wild, irregular

scouts or henchmen to bring them, and as she was seldom seen at the Crossing or on the stage road, that curiosity was never satisfied. The disappointment to the Postmaster — a man past the middle age — partook of a sentimental nature. He looked at the letters and parcels; he looked at his watch; it was yet early, he could return by noon. He again examined the addresses; they were in the same handwriting as the previous letters. His mind was made up, he would deliver them himself. The poetic, soulful side of his mission was delicately indicated by a pale blue necktie, a clean shirt, and a small package of gingernuts, of which Flip was extravagantly fond.

The common road to Fairley's Ranch was by the stage turnpike to a point below the Gin and Ginger Woods, where the prudent horseman usually left his beast and followed the intersecting trail afoot. It was here that the Postmaster suddenly observed on the edge of the wood the figure of an elegantly dressed woman; she was walking slowly, and apparently at her ease; one hand held her skirts lightly gathered between her gloved fingers, the other slowly swung a riding-whip. Was it a picnic of some people from Monterey or Santa Cruz? The spectacle was novel enough to justify his coming nearer. Suddenly she withdrew into the wood; he lost sight of her; she was gone. He remembered, however, that Flip was still to be seen, and as the steep trail was beginning to tax all his energies, he was fain to hurry forward. The sun was nearly vertical when he turned into the cañon, and saw the bark roof of the cabin beyond. At almost the same moment Flip appeared, flushed and panting, in the road before him.

"You 've got something for me," she said, pointing to the parcel and letter. Completely taken by surprise, the Postmaster mechanically yielded them up, and as instantly regretted it. "They 're paid for," continued Flip, observing his hesitation.

"That 's so," stammered the official of the Crossing, seeing his last chance of knowing the contents of the parcel vanish; "but I thought ez it 's a valooable package, maybe ye might want to examine it to see that it was all right afore ye receipted for it."

"I 'll risk it," said Flip coolly, "and if it ain't right I 'll let ye know."

As the girl seemed inclined to retire with her property, the Postmaster was driven to other conversation. "We ain't had the pleasure of seeing you down at the Crossing for a month o' Sundays," he began, with airy yet pronounced gallantry. "Some folks let on you was keepin' company with some feller like Bijah Brown, and you were getting a little too set up for the Crossing." The individual here mentioned being the county butcher, and supposed to exhibit his hopeless affection for Flip by making a long and useless divergence from his weekly route to enter the cañon for "orders," Flip did not deem it necessary to reply. "Then I allowed how ez you might have company," he continued; "I reckon there 's some city folks up at the summit. I saw a mighty smart, fash'n'ble gal cavorting round. Hed no end o' style and fancy fixin's. That 's my kind, I tell you. I just weaken on that sort o' gal," he continued, in the firm belief that he had awakened Flip's jealousy, as he glanced at her well-worn homespun frock, and found her eyes suddenly fixed on his own.

"Strange I ain't got to see her yet," she replied coolly, shouldering her parcel, and quite ignoring any sense of obligation to him for his extra-official act.

"But you might get to see her at the edge of the Gin and Ginger Woods," he persisted feebly, in a last effort to detain her; "if you 'll take a pasear there with me." Flip's only response was to walk on toward the cabin, whence, with a vague complimentary suggestion of "dropin' in to pass the time o' day" with her father, the Postmaster meekly followed.

The paternal Fairley, once convinced that his daughter's new companion required no pecuniary or material assistance from his hands, relaxed to the extent of entering into a querulous confidence with him, during which Flip took the opportunity of slipping away. As Fairley had that infelicitous tendency of most weak natures, to unconsciously exaggerate unimportant details in their talk, the Postmaster presently became convinced that the butcher was a constant and assiduous suitor of Flip's. The absurdity of his sending parcels and letters by post when he might bring them himself did not strike the official. On the contrary, he believed it to be a master-stroke of cunning. Fired by jealousy and Flip's indifference, he "deemed it his duty" — using that facile form of cowardly offensiveness — to betray Flip.

Of which she was happily oblivious. Once away from the cabin, she plunged into the woods, with the parcel swung behind her like a knapsack. Leaving the trail, she presently struck off in a straight line through cover and underbrush with the unerring instinct of an animal, climbing hand over hand the steepest ascent, or fluttering like a bird from branch to branch down the deepest declivity. She soon reached that part of the trail where the susceptible Postmaster had seen the fascinating unknown. Assuring herself she was not followed, she crept through the thicket until she reached a little waterfall and basin that had served the fugitive Lance for a bath. The spot bore signs of later and more frequent occupancy, and when Flip carefully removed some bark and brushwood from a cavity in the rock and drew forth various folded garments, it was evident she used it as a sylvan dressing-room. Here she opened the parcel; it contained a small and delicate shawl of yellow China crape. Flip instantly threw it over her shoulders and stepped hurriedly toward the edge of the wood. Then she began to pass backward and forward

before the trunk of a tree. At first nothing was visible on the tree, but a closer inspection showed a large pane of ordinary window glass stuck in the fork of the branches. It was placed at such a cunning angle against the darkness of the forest opening that it made a soft and mysterious mirror, not unlike a Claude Lorraine glass, wherein not only the passing figure of the young girl was seen, but the dazzling green and gold of the hillside, and the far-off silhouetted crests of the Coast Range.

But this was evidently only a prelude to a severer rehearsal. When she returned to the waterfall she unearthed from her stores a large piece of yellow soap and some yards of rough cotton "sheeting." These she deposited beside the basin and again crept to the edge of the wood to assure herself that she was alone. Satisfied that no intruding foot had invaded that virgin bower, she returned to her bath and began to undress. A slight wind followed her, and seemed to whisper to the circumjacent trees. It appeared to waken her sister naiads and nymphs, who, joining their leafy fingers, softly drew around her a gently moving band of trembling lights and shadows, of flecked sprays and inextricably mingled branches, and involved her in a chaste sylvan obscurity, veiled alike from pursuing god or stumbling shepherd. Within these hallowed precincts was the musical ripple of laughter and falling water, and at times the glimpse of a lithe brier-caught limb, or a ray of sunlight trembling over bright flanks, or the white austere outline of a childish bosom.

When she drew again the leafy curtain, and once more stepped out of the wood, she was completely transformed. It was the figure that had appeared to the Postmaster; the slight, erect, graceful form of a young woman modishly attired. It was Flip, but Flip made taller by the lengthened skirt and clinging habiliments of fashion. Flip freckled, but, through the cunning of a relief of yellow

color in her gown, her piquant brown-shot face and eyes brightened and intensified until she seemed like a spicy odor made visible. I cannot affirm that the judgment of Flip's mysterious modiste was infallible, or that the taste of Mr. Lance Harriott, her patron, was fastidious; enough that it was picturesque, and perhaps not more glaring and extravagant than the color in which Spring herself had once clothed the sere hillside where Flip was now seated. The phantom mirror in the tree fork caught and held her with the sky, the green leaves, the sunlight, and all the graciousness of her surroundings, and the wind gently tossed her hair and the gay ribbons of her gypsy hat. Suddenly she started. Some remote sound in the trail below, inaudible to any ear less fine than hers, arrested her breathing. She rose swiftly and darted into cover.

Ten minutes passed. The sun was declining; the white fog was beginning to creep over the Coast Range. From the edge of the wood Cinderella appeared, disenchanted, and in her homespun garments. The clock had struck — the spell was past. As she disappeared down the trail even the magic mirror, moved by the wind, slipped from the treetop to the ground, and became a piece of common glass.

CHAPTER IV

THE events of the day had produced a remarkable impression on the facial aspect of the charcoal-burning Fairley. Extraordinary processes of thought, indicated by repeated rubbing of his forehead, had produced a high light in the middle and a corresponding deepening of shadow at the sides, until it bore the appearance of a perfect sphere. It was this forehead that confronted Flip reproachfully as became a deceived comrade, menacingly as became an outraged parent in the presence of a third party and — a Postmaster.

"Fine doin's this, yer receivin' clandecent bundles and letters, eh?" he began. Flip sent one swift, withering look of contempt at the Postmaster, who at once becoming invertebrate and groveling, mumbled that he must "get on" to the Crossing, and rose to go. But the old man, who had counted on his presence for moral support, and was clearly beginning to hate him for precipitating this scene with his daughter whom he feared, violently protested.

"Sit down, can't ye? Don't you see you're a witness?" he screamed hysterically.

It was a fatal suggestion. "Witness," repeated Flip scornfully.

"Yes, a witness! He gave ye letters and bundles."

"Were n't they directed to me?" asked Flip.

"Yes," said the Postmaster hesitatingly; "in course, yes."

"Do *you* lay claim to them?" she said, turning to her father.

"No," responded the old man.

"Do you?" sharply, to the Postmaster.

"No," he replied.

"Then," said Flip coolly, "if you're not claimin' 'em for yourself, and you hear father say they ain't his, I reckon the less you have to say about 'em the better."

"Thar's suthin' in that," said the old man, shamelessly abandoning the Postmaster.

"Then why don't she say who sent 'em, and what they are like," said the Postmaster, "if there's nothing in it?"

"Yes," echoed dad. "Flip, why don't you?"

Without answering the direct question, Flip turned upon her father.

"Maybe you forget how you used to row and tear round here because tramps and such like came to the ranch for suthin', and I gave it to 'em? Maybe you'll quit tearin' round and letting yourself be made a fool of now by that man, just because one of those tramps gets up and sends us some presents back in turn?"

"'T was n't me, Flip," said the old man deprecatingly, but glaring at the astonished Postmaster. "'T was n't my doin'. I allus said if you cast your bread on the waters it would come back to you by return mail. The fact is, the Gov'ment is getting too high-handed! Some o' these bloated officials had better climb down before next leckshen."

"Maybe," continued Flip to her father, without looking at her discomfited visitor, "ye 'd better find out whether one of those officials comes up to this yer ranch to steal away a gal about my own size, or to get points about diamond-making. I reckon he don't travel round to find out who writes all the letters that go through the Post-Office."

The Postmaster had seemingly miscalculated the old man's infirm temper, and the daughter's skillful use of it.

He was unprepared for Flip's boldness and audacity, and when he saw that both barrels of the accusation had taken effect on the charcoal-burner, who was rising with epileptic rage, he fairly turned and fled. The old man would have followed him with objurgation beyond the door, but for the restraining hand of Flip.

Baffled and beaten, nevertheless Fate was not wholly unkind to the retreating suitor. Near the Gin and Ginger Woods he picked up a letter which had fallen from Flip's packet. He recognized the writing, and did not scruple to read it. It was not a love epistle, — at least, not such a one as he would have written, — it did not give the address nor the name of the correspondent; but he read the following with greedy eyes: —

"Perhaps it 's just as well that you don't rig yourself out for the benefit of those dead-beats at the Crossing, or any tramp that might hang round the ranch. Keep all your style for me when I come. I can't tell you when, it 's mighty uncertain before the rainy season. But I 'm coming soon. Don't go back on your promise about lettin' up on the tramps, and being a little more high-toned. And don't you give 'em so much. It 's true I sent you hats *twice.* I clean forgot all about the first; but *I* would n't have given a ten-dollar hat to a nigger woman who had a sick baby because I had an extra hat. I 'd have let that baby slide. I forgot to ask whether the skirt is worn separately; I must see that dressmaker sharp about it; but I think you 'll want something on besides a jacket and skirt; at least, it looks like it up here. I don't think you could manage a piano down there without the old man knowing it, and raisin' the devil generally. I promised you I 'd let up on him. Mind you keep all your promises to me. I 'm glad you 're gettin' on with the six-shooter; tin cans are good at fifteen yards, but try it on suthin' that *moves!* I

forgot to say that I am on the track of your big brother. It 's a three years' old track, and he was in Arizona. The friend who told me did n't expatiate much on what he did there, but I reckon they had a high old time. If he 's above the earth I 'll find him, you bet. The yerba buena and the southern wood came all right, — they smelt like you. Say, Flip, do you remember the *last* — the *very last* — thing that happened when you said 'good-by' on the trail? Don't let me ever find out that you 've let anybody else kiss" —

But here the virtuous indignation of the Postmaster found vent in an oath. He threw the letter away. He retained of it only two facts, — Flip *had* a brother who was missing; she had a lover present in the flesh.

How much of the substance of this and previous letters Flip had confided to her father I cannot say. If she suppressed anything it was probably that which affected Lance's secret alone, and it was doubtful how much of that she herself knew. In her own affairs she was frank without being communicative, and never lost her shy obstinacy even with her father. Governing the old man as completely as she did, she appeared most embarrassed when she was most dominant; she had her own way without lifting her voice or her eyes; she seemed oppressed by *mauvaise honte* when she was most triumphant; she would end a discussion with a shy murmur addressed to herself, or a single gesture of self-consciousness.

The disclosure of her strange relations with an unknown man, and the exchange of presents and confidences, seemed to suddenly awake Fairley to a vague, uneasy sense of some unfulfilled duties as a parent. The first effect of this on his weak nature was a peevish antagonism to the cause of it. He had long, fretful monologues on the vanity of diamond-making, if accompanied with "pestering" by

"interlopers;" on the wickedness of concealment and conspiracy, and their effects on charcoal-burning; on the nurturing of spies and "adders" in the family circle, and on the seditiousness of dark and mysterious councils in which a gray-haired father was left out. It was true that a word or look from Flip generally brought these monologues to an inglorious and abrupt termination, but they were none the less lugubrious as long as they lasted. In time they were succeeded by an affectation of contrite apology and self-depreciation. "Don't go out o' the way to ask the old man," he would say, referring to the quantity of bacon to be ordered; "it 's nat'ral a young gal should have her own advisers." The state of the flour-barrel would also produce a like self-abasement. "Unless ye 're already in correspondence about more flour, ye might take the opinion o' the first tramp ye meet ez to whether Santa Cruz Mills is a good brand, but don't ask the old man." If Flip was in conversation with the butcher, Fairley would obtrusively retire with the hope "he was n't intrudin' on their secrets."

These phases of her father's weakness were not frequent enough to excite her alarm, but she could not help noticing they were accompanied with a seriousness unusual to him. He began to be tremulously watchful of her, returning often from work at an earlier hour, and lingering by the cabin in the morning. He brought absurd and useless presents for her, and presented them with a nervous anxiety, poorly concealed by an assumption of careless, paternal generosity. "Suthin' I picked up at the Crossin' for ye to-day," he would say airily, and retire to watch the effect of a pair of shoes two sizes too large, or a fur cap in September. He would have hired a cheap parlor organ for her, but for the apparently unexpected revelation that she could n't play. He had received the news of a clue to his long-lost son without emotion, but lately he seemed to look

upon it as a foregone conclusion, and one that necessarily solved the question of companionship for Flip. "In course, when you've got your own flesh and blood with ye, ye can't go foolin' around with strangers." These autumnal blossoms of affection, I fear, came too late for any effect upon Flip, precociously matured by her father's indifference and selfishness. But she was good-humored, and, seeing him seriously concerned, gave him more of her time, even visited him in the sacred seclusion of the "diamond pit," and listened with far-off eyes to his fitful indictment of all things outside his grimy laboratory. Much of this patient indifference came with a capricious change in her own habits; she no longer indulged in the rehearsal of dress, she packed away her most treasured garments, and her leafy boudoir knew her no more. She sometimes walked on the hillside, and often followed the trail she had taken with Lance when she led him to the ranch. She once or twice extended her walk to the spot where she had parted from him, and as often came shyly away, her eyes downcast and her face warm with color. Perhaps because these experiences and some mysterious instinct of maturing womanhood had left a story in her eyes, which her two adorers, the Postmaster and the butcher, read with passion, she became famous without knowing it. Extravagant stories of her fascinations brought strangers into the valley. The effect upon her father may be imagined. Lance could not have desired a more effective guardian than he proved to be in this emergency. Those who had been told of this hidden pearl were surprised to find it so jealously protected.

CHAPTER V

THE long, parched summer had drawn to its dusty close. Much of it was already blown abroad and dissipated on trail and turnpike, or crackled in harsh, unelastic fibres on hillside and meadow. Some of it had disappeared in the palpable smoke by day and fiery crests by night of burning forests. The besieging fogs on the Coast Range daily thinned their hosts, and at last vanished. The wind changed from northwest to southwest. The salt breath of the sea was on the summit. And then one day the staring, unchanged sky was faintly touched with remote mysterious clouds, and grew tremulous in expression. The next morning dawned upon a newer face in the heavens, on changed woods, on altered outlines, on vanished crests, on forgotten distances. It was raining!

Four weeks of this change, with broken spaces of sunlight and intense blue aerial islands, and then a storm set in. All day the summit pines and redwoods rocked in the blast. At times the onset of the rain seemed to be held back by the fury of the gale, or was visibly seen in sharp waves on the hillside. Unknown and concealed watercourses suddenly overflowed the trails, pools became lakes and brooks rivers. Hidden from the storm, the sylvan silence of sheltered valleys was broken by the impetuous rush of waters; even the tiny streamlet that traversed Flip's retreat in the Gin and Ginger Woods became a cascade.

The storm drove Fairley from his couch early. The falling of a large tree across the trail, and the sudden overflow of a small stream beside it, hastened his steps. But

he was doomed to encounter what was to him a more disagreeable object — a human figure. By the bedraggled drapery that flapped and fluttered in the wind, by the long, unkempt hair that hid the face and eyes, and by the grotesquely misplaced bonnet, the old man recognized one of his old trespassers — an Indian squaw.

"Clear out 'er that! Come, make tracks, will ye?" the old man screamed; but here the wind stopped his voice, and drove him against a hazel-bush.

"Me heap sick," answered the squaw, shivering through her muddy shawl.

"I'll make ye a heap sicker if ye don't vamose the ranch," continued Fairley, advancing.

"Me wantee Wangee girl. Wangee girl give me heap grub," said the squaw, without moving.

"You bet your life," groaned the old man to himself. Nevertheless an idea struck him. "Ye ain't brought no presents, hev ye?" he asked cautiously. "Ye ain't got no pooty things for poor Wangee girl?" he continued insinuatingly.

"Me got heap cache nuts and berries," said the squaw.

"Oh, in course! in course! That's just it," screamed Fairley; "you've got 'em cached only two miles from yer, and you'll go and get 'em for a half-dollar, cash down."

"Me bring Wangee girl to cache," replied the Indian, pointing to the wood. "Honest Injin."

Another bright idea struck Mr. Fairley but it required some elaboration. Hurrying the squaw with him through the pelting rain, he reached the shelter of the corral. Vainly the shivering aborigine drew her tightly bandaged papoose closer to her square, flat breast, and looked longingly toward the cabin; the old man backed her against the palisade. Here he cautiously imparted his dark intentions to employ her to keep watch and ward over the ranch, and especially over its young mistress — "clear out all

the tramps 'ceptin' yourself, and I 'll keep ye in grub and rum." Many and deliberate repetitions of this offer in various forms at last seemed to affect the squaw; she nodded violently, and echoed the last word "rum." "Now," she added. The old man hesitated; she was in possession of his secret; he groaned, and, promising an immediate installment of liquor, led her to the cabin.

The door was so securely fastened against the impact of the storm that some moments elapsed before the bar was drawn, and the old man had become impatient and profane. When it was partly opened by Flip he hastily slipped in, dragging the squaw after him, and cast one single suspicious glance around the rude apartment which served as a sitting-room. Flip had apparently been writing. A small inkstand was still on the board table, but her paper had evidently been concealed before she allowed them to enter. The squaw instantly squatted before the adobe hearth, warmed her bundled baby, and left the ceremony of introduction to her companion. Flip regarded the two with calm preoccupation and indifference. The only thing that touched her interest was the old squaw's draggled skirt and limp neckerchief. They were Flip's own, long since abandoned and cast off in the Gin and Ginger Woods. "Secrets again," whined Fairley, still eyeing Flip furtively. "Secrets again, in course — in course — jiss so. Secrets that must be kep' from the ole man. Dark doin's by one's own flesh and blood. Go on! go on! Don't mind me." Flip did not reply. She had even lost the interest in her old dress. Perhaps it had only touched some note in unison with her reverie.

"Can't ye get the poor critter some whiskey?" he queried fretfully. "Ye used to be peart enuff before." As Flip turned to the corner to lift the demijohn, Fairley took occasion to kick the squaw with his foot, and indicate by extravagant pantomime that the bargain was not to be

alluded to before the girl. Flip poured out some whiskey in a tin cup, and, approaching the squaw, handed it to her. "It 's like ez not," continued Fairley to his daughter, but looking at the squaw, "that she 'll be huntin' the woods off and on, and kinder looking after the last pit near the madroños; ye 'll give her grub and licker ez she likes. Well, d' ye hear, Flip? Are ye moonin' agin with yer secrets? What 's gone with ye?"

If the child were dreaming, it was a delicious dream. Her magnetic eyes were suffused by a strange light, as though the eye itself had blushed; her full pulse showed itself more in the rounding outline of her cheek than in any deepening of color; indeed, if there was any heightening of tint, it was in her freckles, which fairly glistened like tiny spangles. Her eyes were downcast, her shoulder slightly bent, but her voice was low and clear and thoughtful as ever.

"One o' the big pines above the Madroño pit has blown over into the run," she said. "It 's choked up the water, and it 's risin' fast. Like ez not it 's pourin' over into the pit by this time."

The old man rose with a fretful cry. "And why in blazes did n't you say so first?" he screamed, catching up his axe and rushing to the door.

"Ye did n't give me a chance," said Flip, raising her eyes for the first time. With an impatient imprecation, Fairley darted by her and rushed into the wood. In an instant she had shut the door and bolted it. In the same instant the squaw arose, dashed the long hair not only from her eyes but from her head, tore away her shawl and blanket, and revealed the square shoulders of Lance Harriott! Flip remained leaning against the door; but the young man in rising dropped the bandaged papoose, which rolled from his lap into the fire. Flip, with a cry, sprang toward it; but Lance caught her by the waist with one

arm, as with the other he dragged the bundle from the flames.

"Don't be alarmed," he said gayly, "it 's only" —

"What?" said Flip, trying to disengage herself.

"My coat and trousers."

Flip laughed, which encouraged Lance to another attempt to kiss her. She evaded it by diving her head into his waistcoat, and saying, "There 's father."

"But he 's gone to clear away that tree," suggested Lance.

One of Flip's significant silences followed.

"Oh, I see," he laughed. "That was a plan to get him away! Ah!" She had released herself.

"Why did you come like that?" she said, pointing to his wig and blanket.

"To see if you 'd know me," he responded.

"No," said Flip, dropping her eyes. "It 's to keep other people from knowing you. You 're hidin' agin."

"I am," returned Lance; "but," he interrupted, "it 's only the same old thing."

"But you wrote from Monterey that it was all over," she persisted.

"So it would have been," he said gloomily, "but for some dog down here who is hunting up an old scent. I'll spot him yet, and" — He stopped suddenly, with such utter abstraction of hatred in his fixed and glittering eyes that she almost feared him. She laid her hand quite unconsciously on his arm. He grasped it; his face changed.

"I could n't wait any longer to see you, Flip, so I came here anyway," he went on. "I thought to hang round and get a chance to speak to you first, when I fell afoul of the old man. He did n't know me, and tumbled right in my little game. Why, do you believe he wants to hire me for my grub and liquor, to act as a sort of sentry over you and the ranch?" And here he related with great gusto the

substance of his interview. "I reckon as he 's that suspicious," he concluded, "I 'd better play it out now as I 've begun, only it 's mighty hard I can't see you here before the fire in your fancy toggery, Flip, but must dodge in and out of the wet underbrush in these yer duds of yours that I picked up in the old place in the Gin and Ginger Woods."

"Then you came here just to see me?" asked Flip.

"I did."

"For only that?"

"Only that."

Flip dropped her eyes. Lance had got his other arm around her waist, but her resisting little hand was still potent.

"Listen," she said at last without looking up, but apparently talking to the intruding arm, "when dad comes I 'll get him to send you to watch the diamond pit. It is n't far; it 's warm, and" —

"What?"

"I 'll come, after a bit, and see you. Quit foolin' now. If you 'd only have come here like yourself — like — like, — a white man."

"The old man," interrupted Lance, "would have just passed me on to the summit. I could n't have played the lost fisherman on him at this time of year."

"Ye could have been stopped at the Crossing by high water, you silly," said the girl. "It was." This grammatical obscurity referred to the stage-coach.

"Yes, but I might have been tracked to this cabin. And look here, Flip," he said, suddenly straightening himself, and lifting the girl's face to a level with his own; "I don't want you to lie any more for me. It ain't right."

"All right. Ye need n't go to the pit, then, and I won't come."

"Flip!"

"And here 's dad coming. Quick!"

Lance chose to put his own interpretation on this last adjuration. The resisting little hand was now lying quite limp on his shoulder. He drew her brown, bright face near his own, felt her spiced breath on his lips, his cheeks, his hot eyelids, his swimming eyes, kissed her, hurriedly replaced his wig and blanket, and dropped beside the fire with the tremulous laugh of youth and innocent first passion. Flip had withdrawn to the window, and was looking out upon the rocking pines.

"He don't seem to be coming," said Lance, with a half-shy laugh.

"No," responded Flip demurely, pressing her hot oval cheek against the wet panes; "I reckon I was mistaken. You're sure," she added, looking resolutely another way, but still trembling like a magnetic needle toward Lance, as he moved slightly before the fire, "you're *sure* you'd like me to come to you?"

"Sure, Flip?"

"Hush!" said Flip, as this reassuring query of reproachful astonishment appeared about to be emphasized by a forward amatory dash of Lance's; "hush! he's coming this time, sure."

It was, indeed, Fairley, exceedingly wet, exceedingly bedraggled, exceedingly sponged out as to color, and exceedingly profane. It appeared that there was, indeed, a tree that had fallen in the "run," but that, far from diverting the overflow into the pit, it had established "back water," which had forced another outlet. All this might have been detected at once by any human intellect not distracted by correspondence with strangers, and enfeebled by habitually scorning the intellect of its own progenitor. This reckless selfishness had further only resulted in giving "rheumatics" to that progenitor, who now required the external administration of opodeldoc to his limbs, and the internal administration of whiskey. Having thus spoken, Mr.

Fairley, with great promptitude and infantine simplicity, at once bared two legs of entirely different colors and mutely waited for his daughter to rub them. If Flip did this all unconsciously, and with the mechanical dexterity of previous habit, it was because she did not quite understand the savage eyes and impatient gestures of Lance in his encompassing wig and blanket, and because it helped her to voice her thought.

"Ye'll never be able to take yer watch at the diamond pit to-night, dad," she said; "and I've been reck'nin' you might set the squaw there instead. I can show her what to do."

But to Flip's momentary discomfiture, her father promptly objected. "Mebbe I've got suthin' else for her to do. Mebbe I may have my secrets, too — eh?" he said, with dark significance, at the same time administering a significant nudge to Lance, which kept up the young man's exasperation. "No, she'll rest yer a bit just now. I'll set her to watchin' suthin' else, like as not, when I want her." Flip fell into one of her suggestive silences. Lance watched her earnestly, mollified by a single furtive glance from her significant eyes; the rain dashed against the windows, and occasionally spattered and hissed in the hearth of the broad chimney, and Mr. David Fairley, somewhat assuaged by the internal administration of whiskey, grew more loquacious. The genius of incongruity and inconsistency which generally ruled his conduct came out with freshened vigor under the gentle stimulation of spirit. "On an evening like this," he began, comfortably settling himself on the floor beside the chimney, "ye might rig yerself out in them new duds and fancy fixin's that that Sacramento shrimp sent ye, and let your own flesh and blood see ye. If that's too much to do for your old dad, ye might do it to please that Digger squaw as a Christian act." Whether in the hidden depths of the old man's

consciousness there was a feeling of paternal vanity in showing this wretched aborigine the value and importance of the treasure she was about to guard, I cannot say. Flip darted an interrogatory look at Lance, who nodded a quiet assent, and she flew into the inner room. She did not linger on the details of her toilet, but reappeared almost the next moment in her new finery, buttoning the neck of her gown as she entered the room, and chastely stopping at the window to characteristically pull up her stocking. The peculiarity of her situation increased her usual shyness; she played with the black and gold beads of a handsome necklace — Lance's last gift — as the merest child might; her unbuckled shoe gave the squaw a natural opportunity of showing her admiration and devotion by insisting upon buckling it, and gave Lance, under that disguise, an opportunity of covertly kissing the little foot and ankle in the shadow of the chimney; an event which provoked slight hysterical symptoms in Flip and caused her to sit suddenly down in spite of the remonstrances of her parent. "Ef you can't quit gigglin' and squirmin' like an Injin baby yourself, ye 'd better get rid o' them duds," he ejaculated with peevish scorn.

Yet, under this perfunctory rebuke, his weak vanity could not be hidden, and he enjoyed the evident admiration of a creature, whom he believed to be half-witted and degraded, all the more keenly because it did not make him jealous. She could not take Flip from him. Rendered garrulous by liquor, he went to voice his contempt for those who might attempt it. Taking advantage of his daughter's absence to resume her homely garments, he whispered confidentially to Lance: —

"Ye see, these yer fine dresses ye might think is presents. P'r'aps Flip lets on they are. P'r'aps she don't know any better. But they ain't presents. They 're only samples o' dressmaking and jewelry that a vain, conceited shrimp

of a feller up in Sacramento sends down here to get customers for. In course I 'm to pay for 'em. In course he reckons I 'm to do it. In course I calkilate to do it; but he need n't try to play 'em off as presents. He talks suthin' o' coming down here, sportin' hisself off on Flip as a fancy buck! Not ez long ez the old man 's here, you bet!" Thoroughly carried away by his fancied wrongs, it was perhaps fortunate that he did not observe the flashing eyes of Lance behind his lank and lustreless wig; but seeing only the figure of Lance as he had conjured him, he went on: "That 's why I want you to hang around her. Hang around her ontil my boy — him that 's comin' home on a visit — gets here, and I reckon he 'll clear out that yar Sacramento counter-jumper. Only let me get a sight o' him afore Flip does. Eh? D' ye hear? Dog my skin if I don't believe the d—d Injun 's drunk." It was fortunate that at that moment Flip reappeared, and, dropping on the hearth between her father and the infuriated Lance, let her hand slip in his with a warning pressure. The light touch momentarily recalled him to himself and her, but not until the quick-witted girl had had revealed to her, in one startled wave of consciousness, the full extent of Lance's infirmity of temper. With the instinct of awakened tenderness came a sense of responsibility, and a vague premonition of danger. The coy blossom of her heart was scarce unfolded before it was chilled by approaching shadows. Fearful of she knew not what, she hesitated. Every moment of Lance's stay was imperiled by a single word that might spring from his suppressed white lips; beyond and above the suspicions his sudden withdrawal might awaken in her father's breast, she was dimly conscious of some mysterious terror without that awaited him. She listened to the furious onslaught of the wind upon the sycamores beside their cabin, and thought she heard it there; she listened

to the sharp fusillade of rain upon roof and pane, and the turbulent roar and rush of leaping mountain torrents at their very feet, and fancied it was there. She suddenly sprang to the window, and, pressing her eyes to the pane, saw through the misty turmoil of tossing boughs and swaying branches the scintillating intermittent flames of torches moving on the trail above, and *knew* it was there!

In an instant she was collected and calm. "Dad," she said, in her ordinary indifferent tone, "there 's torches movin' up toward the diamond pit. Likely it 's tramps. I 'll take the squaw and see." And before the old man could stagger to his feet she had dragged Lance with her into the road.

CHAPTER VI

THE wind charged down upon them, slamming the door at their backs, extinguishing the broad shaft of light that had momentarily shot out into the darkness, and swept them a dozen yards away. Gaining the lee of a madroño tree, Lance opened his blanketed arms, enfolded the girl, and felt her for one brief moment tremble and nestle in his bosom like some frightened animal. "Well," he said gayly, "what next?" Flip recovered herself. "You 're safe now anywhere outside the house. But did you expect them to-night?" Lance shrugged his shoulders. "Why not?" "Hush!" returned the girl; "they 're coming this way."

The four flickering, scattered lights presently dropped into line. The trail had been found; they were coming nearer. Flip breathed quickly; the spiced aroma of her presence filled the blanket as he drew her tightly beside him. He had forgotten the storm that raged around them, the mysterious foe that was approaching, until Flip caught his sleeve with a slight laugh. "Why, it 's Kennedy and Bijah!"

"Who 's Kennedy and Bijah?" asked Lance curtly.

"Kennedy 's the Postmaster and Bijah 's the Butcher."

"What do they want?" continued Lance.

"Me," said Flip coyly.

"You?"

"Yes; let 's run away."

Half leading, half dragging her friend, Flip made her way with unerring woodcraft down the ravine. The

sound of voices and even the tumult of the storm became fainter, an acrid smell of burning green wood smarted Lance's lips and eyes; in the midst of the darkness beneath him gradually a faint, gigantic nimbus like a lurid eye glowed and sank, quivered and faded with the spent breath of the gale as it penetrated their retreat. "The pit," whispered Flip; "it 's safe on the other side," she added, cautiously skirting the orbit of the great eye, and leading him to a sheltered nest of bark and sawdust. It was warm and odorous. Nevertheless, they both deemed it necessary to enwrap themselves in the single blanket. The eye beamed fitfully upon them, occasionally a wave of lambent tremulousness passed across it; its weirdness was an excuse for their drawing nearer each other in playful terror.

"Flip."

"Well?"

"What did the other two want? To see you, *too?*"

"Likely," said Flip, without the least trace of coquetry. "There 's been a lot of strangers yer, off and on."

"Perhaps you 'd like to go back and see them?"

"Do you want me to?"

Lance's reply was a kiss. Nevertheless he was vaguely uneasy. "Looks a little as if I were running away, don't it?" he suggested.

"No," said Flip; "they think you 're only a squaw; it 's me they 're after." Lance smarted a little at this infelicitous speech. A strange and irritating sensation had been creeping over him — it was his first experience of shame and remorse. "I reckon I 'll go back and see," he said, rising abruptly.

Flip was silent. She was thinking. Believing that the men were seeking her only, she knew that their intention would be directed from her companion when it was found out he was no longer with her, and she dreaded to meet them in his irritable presence.

"Go," she said; "tell dad something's wrong in the diamond pit, and say I 'm watching it for him here."

"And you?"

"I 'll go there and wait for him. If he can't get rid of them, and they follow him there, I 'll come back here and meet you. Anyhow, I 'll manage to have dad wait there a spell."

She took his hand and led him back by a different path to the trail. He was surprised to find that the cabin, its window glowing from the fire, was only a hundred yards away. "Go in the back way, by the shed. Don't go in the room, nor near the light, if you can. Don't talk inside, but call or beckon to dad. Remember," she said, with a laugh, "you're keeping watch of me for him. Pull your hair down on your eyes, so." This operation, like most feminine embellishments of the masculine toilet, was attended by a kiss, and Flip, stepping back into the shadow, vanished in the storm.

Lance's first movements were inconsistent with his assumed sex. He picked up his draggled skirt and drew a bowie-knife from his boot. From his bosom he took a revolver, turning the chambers noiselessly as he felt the caps. He then crept toward the cabin softly, and gained the shed. It was quite dark but for a pencil of light piercing a crack of the rude, ill-fitting door that opened on the sitting-room. A single voice not unfamiliar to him, raised in half-brutal triumph, greeted his ears. A name was mentioned — his own! His angry hand was on the latch. One moment more and he would have burst the door, but in that instant another name was uttered — a name that dropped his hand from the latch and the blood from his cheeks. He staggered backward, passed his hand swiftly across his forehead, recovered himself with a gesture of mingled rage and despair, and, sinking on his knees beside the door, pressed his hot temples against the crack.

"Do I know Lance Harriott?" said the voice. "Do I know the d—d ruffian? Did n't I hunt him a year ago into the brush three miles from the Crossing? Did n't we lose sight of him the very day he turned up yer at this ranch, and got smuggled over into Monterey? Ain't it the same man as killed Arkansaw Bob — Bob Ridley — the name he went by in Sonora? And who was Bob Ridley, eh? Who? Why, you d—d old fool, it was Bob Fairley — YOUR SON!"

The old man's voice rose querulous and indistinct.

"What are ye talkin' about?" interrupted the first speaker. "I tell you I *know*. Look at these pictures. I found 'em on his body. Look at 'em. Pictures of you and your girl. P'r'aps you 'll deny them. P'r'aps you 'll tell me I lie when I tell you he told me he was your son; told me how he ran away from you; how you were livin' somewhere in the mountains makin' gold, or suthin' else, outer charcoal. He told me who he was as a secret. He never let on he told it to any one else. And when I found that the man who killed him, Lance Harriott, had been hidin' here, had been sendin' spies all around to find out all about your son, had been foolin' you, and tryin' to ruin your gal as he had killed your boy, I knew that *he* knew it too."

"LIAR!"

The door fell in with a crash. There was the sudden apparition of the demoniac face, still half hidden by the long trailing black locks of hair that curled like Medusa's around it. A cry of terror filled the room. Three of the men dashed from the door and fled precipitately. The man who had spoken sprang toward his rifle in the chimney corner. But the movement was his last; a blinding flash and shattering report interposed between him and his weapon. The impulse carried him forward headlong into the fire, that hissed and spluttered with his blood, and Lance Harriott, with his smoking pistol, strode past him to the door. Al-

ready far down the trail there were hurried voices, the crack and crackling of impending branches growing fainter and fainter in the distance. Lance turned back to the solitary living figure — the old man.

Yet he might have been dead too, he sat so rigid and motionless, his fixed eyes staring vacantly at the body on the hearth. Before him on the table lay the cheap photographs, one evidently of himself, taken in some remote epoch of complexion, one of a child which Lance recognized as Flip.

"Tell me," said Lance hoarsely, laying his quivering hand on the table, "was Bob Ridley your son?"

"My son," echoed the old man in a strange, far-off voice, without turning his eyes from the corpse, — "my son — is — is — is there!" pointing to the dead man. "Hush! Did n't he tell you so? Did n't you hear him say it? Dead — dead — shot — shot!"

"Silence! are you crazy, man?" interposed Lance tremblingly; "that is not Bob Ridley, but a dog, a coward, a liar, gone to his reckoning. Hear me! If your son *was* Bob Ridley, I swear to God I never knew it, now or — or — *then*. Do you hear me? Tell me! Do you believe me? Speak! You shall speak!"

He laid his hand almost menacingly on the old man's shoulder. Fairley slowly raised his head. Lance fell back with a groan of horror. The weak lips were wreathed with a feeble imploring smile, but the eyes wherein the fretful, peevish, suspicious spirit had dwelt were blank and tenantless; the flickering intellect that had lit them was blown out and vanished.

Lance walked toward the door and remained motionless for a moment, gazing into the night. When he turned back again toward the fire his face was as colorless as the dead man's on the hearth; the fire of passion was gone from his beaten eyes; his step was hesitating and slow. He went up to the table.

"I say, old man," he said, with a strange smile and an odd, premature suggestion of the infinite weariness of death in his voice, "you would n't mind giving me this, would you?" and he took up the picture of Flip. The old man nodded repeatedly. "Thank you," said Lance. He went to the door, paused a moment, and returned. "Good-by, old man," he said, holding out his hand. Fairley took it with a childish smile. "He 's dead," said the old man softly, holding Lance's hand, but pointing to the hearth.

"Yes," said Lance, with the faintest of smiles on the palest of faces. "You feel sorry for any one that 's dead, don't you?" Fairley nodded again. Lance looked at him with eyes as remote as his own, shook his head, and turned away. When he reached the door he laid his revolver carefully, and, indeed, somewhat ostentatiously, upon a chair. But when he stepped from the threshold he stopped a moment in the light of the open door to examine the lock of a small derringer which he drew from his pocket. He then shut the door carefully, and with the same slow, hesitating step, felt his way into the night.

He had but one idea in his mind, to find some lonely spot; some spot where the footsteps of man would never penetrate, some spot that would yield him rest, sleep, obliteration, forgetfulness, and, above all, where *he* would be forgotten. He had seen such places; surely there were many, — where bones were picked up of dead men who had faded from the earth and had left no other record. If he could only keep his senses now he might find such a spot, but he must be careful, for her little feet went everywhere, and she must never see him again alive or dead. And in the midst of his thoughts, and the darkness, and the storm, he heard a voice at his side, "Lance, how long you have been!"

. . . . . .

Left to himself, the old man again fell into a vacant

contemplation of the dead body before him, until a stronger blast swept down like an avalanche upon the cabin, burst through the ill-fastened door and broken chimney, and, dashing the ashes and living embers over the floor, filled the room with blinding smoke and flame. Fairley rose with a feeble cry, and then, as if acted upon by some dominant memory, groped under the bed until he found his buckskin bag and his precious crystal, and fled precipitately from the room. Lifted by this second shock from his apathy, he returned to the fixed idea of his life, — the discovery and creation of the diamond, — and forgot all else. The feeble grasp that his shaken intellect kept of the events of the night relaxed, the disguised Lance, the story of his son, the murder, slipped into nothingness; there remained only the one idea, his nightly watch by the diamond pit. The instinct of long habit was stronger than the darkness or the onset of the storm, and he kept his tottering way over stream and fallen timber until he reached the spot. A sudden tremor seemed to shake the lambent flame that had lured him on. He thought he heard the sound of voices; there were signs of recent disturbance, — footprints in the sawdust! With a cry of rage and suspicion Fairley slipped into the pit and sprang toward the nearest opening. To his frenzied fancy it had been tampered with, his secret discovered, the fruit of his long labors stolen from him that very night. With superhuman strength he began to open the pit, scattering the half-charred logs right and left, and giving vent to the suffocating gases that rose from the now incandescent charcoal. At times the fury of the gale would drive it back and hold it against the sides of the pit, leaving the opening free; at times, following the blind instinct of habit, the demented man would fall upon his face and bury his nose and mouth in the wet bark and sawdust. At last, the paroxysm past, he sank back again into his old apathetic attitude of watching, the attitude he had so often

kept beside his sylvan crucible. In this attitude and in silence he waited for the dawn.

It came with a hush in the storm; it came with blue openings in the broken-up and tumbled heavens; it came with stars that glistened first, and then paled, and at last sank drowning in those deep cerulean lakes; it came with those cerulean lakes broadening into vaster seas, whose shores expanded at last into one illimitable ocean, cerulean no more, but flecked with crimson and opal dyes; it came with the lightly lifted misty curtain of the day, torn and rent on crag and pine-top, but always lifting, lifting. It came with the sparkle of emerald in the grasses, and the flash of diamonds in every spray, with a whisper in the awakening woods, and voices in the traveled roads and trails.

The sound of these voices stopped before the pit, and seemed to interrogate the old man. He came, and, putting his fingers on his lips, made a sign of caution. When three or four men had descended he bade them follow him, saying, weakly and disjointedly, but persistently: "My boy — my son Robert — came home — came home at last — here with Flip — both of them — come and see!"

He had reached a little niche or nest in the hillside, and stopped, and suddenly drew aside a blanket. Beneath it, side by side, lay Flip and Lance, dead, with their cold hands clasped in each other's.

"Suffocated!" said two or three, turning with horror toward the broken-up and still smouldering pit.

"Asleep!" said the old man. "Asleep! I've seen 'em lying that way when they were babies together. Don't tell me! Don't say I don't know my own flesh and blood! So! so! So, my pretty ones!" He stooped and kissed them. Then, drawing the blanket over them gently, he rose and said softly, "Good-night!"

FOUND AT BLAZING STAR

THE rain had only ceased with the gray streaks of morning at Blazing Star, and the settlement awoke to a moral sense of cleanliness, and the finding of forgotten knives, tin cups, and smaller camp utensils, where the heavy showers had washed away the débris and dust heaps before the cabin doors. Indeed, it was recorded in Blazing Star that a fortunate early riser had once picked up on the highway a solid chunk of gold quartz which the rain had freed from its incumbering soil, and washed into immediate and glittering popularity. Possibly this may have been the reason why early risers in that locality, during the rainy season, adopted a thoughtful habit of body, and seldom lifted their eyes to the rifted or india-ink washed skies above them.

"Cass" Beard had risen early that morning, but not with a view to discovery. A leak in his cabin roof — quite consistent with his careless, improvident habits — had roused him at four A. M., with a flooded "bunk" and wet blankets. The chips from his wood-pile refused to kindle a fire to dry his bedclothes, and he had recourse to a more provident neighbor's to supply the deficiency. This was nearly opposite. Mr. Cassius crossed the highway, and stopped suddenly. Something glittered in the nearest red pool before him. Gold, surely! But, wonderful to relate, not an irregular, shapeless fragment of crude ore, fresh from Nature's crucible, but a bit of jeweler's handicraft in the form of a plain gold ring. Looking at it more attentively, he saw that it bore the inscription, "May to Cass."

Like most of his fellow gold-seekers, Cass was superstitious. "Cass!" His own name! He tried the ring. It fitted his little finger closely. It was evidently a woman's ring. He looked up and down the highway. No one was yet stirring. Little pools of water in the red road were beginning to glitter and grow rosy from the far-flushing east, but there was no trace of the owner of the shining waif. He knew that there was no woman in camp, and among his few comrades in the settlement he remembered to have seen none wearing an ornament like that. Again, the coincidence of the inscription to his rather peculiar nickname would have been a perennial source of playful comment in a camp that made no allowance for sentimental memories. He slipped the glittering little hoop into his pocket, and thoughtfully returned to his cabin.

Two hours later, when the long, straggling procession, which every morning wended its way to Blazing Star Gulch, — the seat of mining operations in the settlement, — began to move, Cass saw fit to interrogate his fellows.

"Ye did n't none on ye happen to drop anything round yer last night?" he asked cautiously.

"I dropped a pocketbook containing government bonds and some other securities, with between fifty and sixty thousand dollars," responded Peter Drummond carelessly; "but no matter, if any man will return a few autograph letters from foreign potentates that happened to be in it, — of no value to anybody but the owner, — he can keep the money. Thar 's nothin' mean about me," he concluded languidly.

This statement, bearing every evidence of the grossest mendacity, was lightly passed over, and the men walked on with the deepest gravity.

"But hev you?" Cass presently asked of another.

"I lost my pile to Jack Hamlin at draw-poker, over at

Wingdam last night," returned the other pensively, "but I don't calkilate to find it lying round loose."

Forced at last by this kind of irony into more detailed explanation, Cass confided to them his discovery, and produced his treasure. The result was a dozen vague surmises,— only one of which seemed to be popular, and to suit the dyspeptic despondency of the party, — a despondency born of hastily masticated fried pork and flapjacks. The ring was believed to have been dropped by some passing "road agent" laden with guilty spoil.

"Ef I was you," said Drummond gloomily, "I would n't flourish that yer ring around much afore folks. I 've seen better men nor you strung up a tree by Vigilantes for having even less than that in their possession."

"And I would n't say much about bein' up so d—d early this morning," added an even more pessimistic comrade; "it might look bad before a jury."

With this the men sadly dispersed, leaving the innocent Cass with the ring in his hand, and a general impression on his mind that he was already on object of suspicion to his comrades,— an impression, it is hardly necessary to say, they fully intended should be left to rankle in his guileless bosom.

Notwithstanding Cass's first hopeful superstition, the ring did not seem to bring him nor the camp any luck. Daily the "clean up" brought the same scant rewards to their labors, and deepened the sardonic gravity of Blazing Star. But if Cass found no material result from his treasure, it stimulated his lazy imagination, and, albeit a dangerous and seductive stimulant, at least lifted him out of the monotonous grooves of his half-careless, half-slovenly, but always self-contented camp life. Heeding the wise caution of his comrades, he took the habit of wearing the ring only at night. Wrapped in his blanket, he stealthily slipped the golden circlet over his little finger, and, as he

averred, "slept all the better for it." Whether it ever evoked any warmer dream or vision during those calm, cold, virgin-like spring nights, when even the moon and the greater planets retreated into the icy-blue, steel-like firmament, I cannot say. Enough that this superstition began to be colored a little by fancy, and his fatalism somewhat mitigated by hope. Dreams of this kind did not tend to promote his efficiency in the communistic labors of the camp, and brought him a self-isolation that, however gratifying at first, soon debarred him the benefits of that hard practical wisdom which underlaid the grumbling of his fellow workers.

"I 'm dog-goned," said one commentator, "ef I don't believe that Cass is looney over that yer ring he found. Wears it on a string under his shirt."

Meantime, the seasons did not wait the discovery of the secret. The red pools in Blazing Star highway were soon dried up in the fervent June sun and riotous night winds of those altitudes. The ephemeral grasses that had quickly supplanted these pools and the chocolate-colored mud, were as quickly parched and withered. The footprints of spring became vague and indefinite, and were finally lost in the impalpable dust of the summer highway.

In one of his long, aimless excursions, Cass had penetrated a thick undergrowth of buckeye and hazel, and found himself quite unexpectedly upon the highroad to Red Chief's Crossing. Cass knew by the lurid cloud of dust that hid the distance that the up coach had passed. He had already reached that stage of superstition when the most trivial occurrence seemed to point in some way to an elucidation of the mystery of his treasure. His eyes had mechanically fallen to the ground again, as if he half expected to find in some other waif a hint or corroboration of his imaginings. Thus abstracted, the figure of a young girl on horseback, in the road directly before the bushes he

emerged from, appeared to have sprung directly from the ground.

"Oh, come here, please do; quick!"

Cass stared, and then moved hesitatingly toward her.

"I heard some one coming through the bushes, and I waited," she went on. "Come quick. It 's something too awful for anything."

In spite of this appalling introduction, Cass could not but notice that the voice, although hurried and excited, was by no means agitated or frightened; that the eyes which looked into his sparkled with a certain kind of pleased curiosity.

"It was just here," she went on vivaciously, "just here that I went into the bush and cut a switch for my mare, — and," — leading him along at a brisk trot by her side, — "just here, look, see! this is what I found."

It was scarcely thirty feet from the road. The only object that met Cass's eye was a man's stiff, tall hat, lying emptily and vacantly in the grass. It was new, shiny, and of modish shape. But it was so incongruous, so perkily smart, and yet so feeble and helpless lying there, so ghastly ludicrous in its very inappropriateness and incapacity to adjust itself to the surrounding landscape, that it affected him with something more than a sense of its grotesqueness, and he could only stare at it blankly.

"But you 're not looking the right way," the girl went on sharply; "look there!"

Cass followed the direction of her whip. At last, what might have seemed a coat thrown carelessly on the ground met his eye, but presently he became aware of a white, rigid, aimlessly-clinched hand protruding from the flaccid sleeve; mingled with it in some absurd way and half hidden by the grass, lay what might have been a pair of cast-off trousers but for two rigid boots that pointed in opposite angles to the sky. It was a dead man! So palpably

dead that life seemed to have taken flight from his very clothes. So impotent, feeble, and degraded by them that the naked subject of a dissecting-table would have been less insulting to humanity. The head had fallen back, and was partly hidden in a gopher burrow, but the white, upturned face and closed eyes had less of helpless death in them than those wretched enwrappings. Indeed, one limp hand that lay across the swollen abdomen lent itself to the grotesquely hideous suggestion of a gentleman sleeping off the excesses of a hearty dinner.

"Ain't he horrid?" continued the girl; "but what killed him?"

Struggling between a certain fascination at the girl's cold-blooded curiosity and horror of the murdered man, Cass hesitatingly lifted the helpless head. A bluish hole above the right temple, and a few brown paint-like spots on the forehead, shirt collar, and matted hair, proved the only record.

"Turn him over again," said the girl impatiently, as Cass was about to relinquish his burden. "Maybe you 'll find another wound."

But Cass was dimly remembering certain formalities that in older civilizations attend the discovery of dead bodies, and postponed a present inquest.

"Perhaps you 'd better ride on, miss, afore you get summoned as a witness. I 'll give warning at Red Chief's Crossing, and send the coroner down here."

"Let me go with you," she said earnestly; "it would be such fun. I don't mind being a witness. Or," she added, without heeding Cass's look of astonishment, "I 'll wait here till you come back."

"But you see, miss, it would n't seem right" — began Cass.

"But I found him first," interrupted the girl, with a pout.

Staggered by this preëmptive right, sacred to all miners, Cass stopped.

"Who is the coroner?" she asked.

"Joe Hornsby."

"The tall, lame man, who was half eaten by a grizzly?"

"Yes."

"Well, look now! I'll ride on and bring him back in half an hour. There!"

"But, miss" —

"Oh, don't mind *me*. I never saw anything of this kind before, and I want to see it *all*."

"Do you know Hornsby?" asked Cass, unconsciously a trifle irritated.

"No, but I'll bring him." She wheeled her horse into the road.

In the presence of this living energy Cass quite forgot the helpless dead. "Have you been long in these parts, miss?" he asked.

"About two weeks," she answered shortly. "Good-by, just now. Look around for the pistol or anything else you can find, although *I* have been over the whole ground twice already."

A little puff of dust as the horse sprang into the road, a muffled shuffle, struggle, then the regular beat of hoofs, and she was gone.

After five minutes had passed, Cass regretted that he had not accompanied her: waiting in such a spot was an irksome task. Not that there was anything in the scene itself to awaken gloomy imaginings; the bright, truthful Californian sunshine scoffed at any illusion of creeping shadows or waving branches. Once, in the rising wind, the empty hat rolled over — but only in a ludicrous, drunken way. A search for any further sign or token had proved futile, and Cass grew impatient. He began to hate himself for having stayed; he would have fled but for

shame. Nor was his good humor restored when at the close of a weary half-hour two galloping figures emerged from the dusty horizon — Hornsby and the young girl.

His vague annoyance increased as he fancied that both seemed to ignore him, the coroner barely acknowledging his presence with a nod. Assisted by the young girl, whose energy and enthusiasm evidently delighted him, Hornsby raised the body for a more careful examination. The dead man's pockets were carefully searched. A few coins, a silver pencil, knife, and tobacco-box were all they found. It gave no clue to his identity. Suddenly the young girl, who had, with unabashed curiosity, knelt beside the exploring official hands of the Red Chief, uttered a cry of gratification.

"Here 's something! It dropped from the bosom of his shirt on the ground. Look!"

She was holding in the air, between her thumb and fore finger, a folded bit of well-worn newspaper. Her eyes sparkled.

"Shall I open it?" she asked.

"Yes."

"It 's a little ring," she said; "looks like an engagement ring. Something is written on it. Look! 'May to Cass.'"

Cass darted forward. "It 's mine," he stammered, "mine! I dropped it. It 's nothing — nothing," he went on, after a pause, embarrassed and blushing, as the girl and her companion both stared at him; "a mere trifle. I 'll take it."

But the coroner opposed his outstretched hand. "Not much," he said significantly.

"But it 's *mine*," continued Cass, indignation taking the place of shame at his discovered secret. "I found it six months ago in the road. I — picked it up."

"With your name already written on it! How handy!" said the coroner grimly.

"It 's an old story," said Cass, blushing again under the half-mischievous, half-searching eyes of the girl. "All Blazing Star knows I found it."

"Then ye 'll have no difficulty in provin' it," said Hornsby coolly. "Just now, however, *we* 've found it, and we propose to keep it for the inquest."

Cass shrugged his shoulders. Further altercation would have only heightened his ludicrous situation in the girl's eyes. He turned away, leaving his treasure in the coroner's hands.

The inquest, a day or two later, was prompt and final. No clue to the dead man's identity; no evidence sufficiently strong to prove murder or suicide; no trace of any kind, inculpating any party, known or unknown, were found. But much publicity and interest were given to the proceedings by the presence of the principal witness, a handsome girl. "To the pluck, persistency, and intellect of Miss Porter," said the "Red Chief Recorder," "Tuolumne County owes the recovery of the body."

No one who was present at the inquest failed to be charmed with the appearance and conduct of this beautiful young lady.

"Miss Porter has but lately arrived in this district, in which, it is hoped, she will become an honored resident, and continue to set an example to all lackadaisical and sentimental members of the so-called 'sterner sex.'" After this universally recognized allusion to Cass Beard, the "Recorder" returned to its record: "Some interest was excited by what appeared to be a clue to the mystery in the discovery of a small gold engagement ring on the body. Evidence was afterward offered to show it was the property of a Mr. Cass Beard of Blazing Star, who appeared upon the scene *after* the discovery of the corpse by Miss Porter. He alleged he had dropped it in lifting the unfortunate remains of the deceased. Much amusement was

created in court by the sentimental confusion of the claimant, and a certain partisan spirit shown by his fellow miners of Blazing Star. It appearing, however, by the admission of this sighing Strephon of the Foothills, that he had himself *found* this pledge of affection lying in the highway six months previous, the coroner wisely placed it in the safe-keeping of the county court until the appearance of the rightful owner."

Thus on the 13th of September, 186–, the treasure found at Blazing Star passed out of the hands of its finder.

. . . . . .

Autumn brought an abrupt explanation of the mystery. Kanaka Joe had been arrested for horse-stealing, but had with noble candor confessed to the finer offense of manslaughter. That swift and sure justice which overtook the horse-stealer in these altitudes was stayed a moment and hesitated, for the victim was clearly the mysterious unknown. Curiosity got the better of an extempore judge and jury.

"It was a fair fight," said the accused, not without some human vanity, feeling that the camp hung upon his words, "and was settled by the man az was peartest and liveliest with his weapon. We had a sort of unpleasantness over at Lagrange the night afore, along of our both hevin' a monotony of four aces. We had a clinch and a stamp around, and when we was separated it was only a question of shootin' on sight. He left Lagrange at sun-up the next morning, and I struck across a bit o' buckeye and underbrush and came upon him, accidental like, on the Red Chief Road. I drawed when I sighted him, and called out. He slipped from his mare and covered himself with her flanks, reaching for his holster, but she rared and backed down on him across the road and into the grass, where I got in another shot and fetched him."

"And you stole his mare?" suggested the Judge.

"I got away," said the gambler simply.

Further questioning only elicited the fact that Joe did not know the name or condition of his victim. He was a stranger in Lagrange.

It was a breezy afternoon, with some turbulency in the camp, and much windy discussion over this unwonted delay of justice. The suggestion that Joe should be first hanged for horse-stealing and then tried for murder was angrily discussed, but milder counsels were offered — that the fact of the killing should be admitted only as proof of the theft. A large party from Red Chief had come over to assist in judgment, among them the coroner.

Cass Beard had avoided these proceedings, which only recalled an unpleasant experience, and was wandering with pick, pan, and wallet far from the camp. These accoutrements, as I have before intimated, justified any form of aimless idleness under the equally aimless title of "prospecting." He had at the end of three hours' relaxation reached the highway to Red Chief, half hidden by blinding clouds of dust torn from the crumbling red road at every gust which swept down the mountain-side. The spot had a familiar aspect to Cass, although some freshly dug holes near the wayside, with scattered earth beside them, showed the presence of a recent prospector. He was struggling with his memory, when the dust was suddenly dispersed, and he found himself again at the scene of the murder. He started: he had not put foot on the road since the inquest. There lacked only the helpless dead man and the contrasting figure of the alert young woman to restore the picture. The body was gone, it was true, but as he turned he beheld Miss Porter, at a few paces distant, sitting her horse as energetic and observant as on the first morning they had met. A superstitious thrill passed over him and awoke his old antagonism.

She nodded to him slightly. "I came here to refresh my memory," she said, "as Mr. Hornsby thought I might be asked to give my evidence again at Blazing Star."

Cass carelessly struck an aimless blow with his pick against the sod, and did not reply.

"And you?" she queried.

"*I* stumbled upon the place just now while prospecting, or I should n't be here."

"Then it was *you* made these holes?"

"No," said Cass, with ill-concealed disgust. "Nobody but a stranger would go foolin' round such a spot."

He stopped, as the rude significance of his speech struck him, and added surlily, "I mean — no one would dig here."

The girl laughed, and showed a set of very white teeth in her square jaw. Cass averted his face.

"Do you mean to say that every miner does n't know that it's lucky to dig wherever human blood has been spilt?"

Cass felt a return of his superstition, but he did not look up. "I never heard it before," he said severely.

"And you call yourself a California miner?"

"I do."

It was impossible for Miss Porter to misunderstand his curt speech and unsocial manner. She stared at him and colored slightly. Lifting her reins lightly, she said: "You certainly do not seem like most of the miners I have met."

"Nor you like any girl from the East I ever met," he responded.

"What do you mean?" she asked, checking her horse.

"What I say," he answered doggedly. Reasonable as this reply was, it immediately struck him that it was scarcely dignified or manly. But before he could explain himself Miss Porter was gone.

He met her again that very evening. The trial had been summarily suspended by the appearance of the Sheriff of Calaveras and his posse, who took Joe from that self-constituted tribunal of Blazing Star and set his face southward and toward authoritative although more cautious justice. But not before the evidence of the previous inquest had been read, and the incident of the ring again delivered to the public. It is said the prisoner burst into an incredulous laugh and asked to see this mysterious waif. It was handed to him. Standing in the very shadow of the gallows tree — which might have been one of the pines that sheltered the billiard-room in which the Vigilance Committee held their conclave — the prisoner gave way to a burst of merriment, so genuine and honest that the judge and jury joined in automatic sympathy. When silence was restored an explanation was asked by the Judge. But there was no response from the prisoner except a subdued chuckle.

"Did this ring belong to you?" asked the Judge severely, the jury and spectators craning their ears forward with an expectant smile already on their faces. But the prisoner's eyes only sparkled maliciously as he looked around the court.

"Tell us, Joe," said a sympathetic and laughter-loving juror, under his breath. "Let it out and we'll make it easy for you."

"Prisoner," said the Judge, with a return of official dignity, "remember that your life is in peril. Do you refuse?"

Joe lazily laid his arm on the back of his chair with (to quote the words of an animated observer) "the air of having a Christian hope and a sequence flush in his hand," and said: "Well, as I reckon I'm not up yer for stealin' a ring that another man lets on to have found, and, as fur as I kin see, hez nothin' to do with the case, I do!" And

as it was here that the Sheriff of Calaveras made a precipitate entry into the room, the mystery remained unsolved.

The effect of this freshly important ridicule on the sensitive mind of Cass might have been foretold by Blazing Star had it ever taken that sensitiveness into consideration. He had lost the good humor and easy pliability which had tempted him to frankness, and he had gradually become bitter and hard. He had at first affected amusement over his own vanished day-dream — hiding his virgin disappointment in his own breast; but when he began to turn upon his feelings he turned upon his comrades also. Cass was for a while unpopular. There is no ingratitude so revolting to the human mind as that of the butt who refuses to be one any longer. The man who rejects that immunity which laughter generally casts upon him and demands to be seriously considered deserves no mercy.

It was under these hard conditions that Cass Beard, convicted of overt sentimentalism, aggravated by inconsistency, stepped into the Red Chief coach that evening. It was his habit usually to ride with the driver, but the presence of Hornsby and Miss Porter on the box-seat changed his intention. Yet he had the satisfaction of seeing that neither had noticed him, and as there was no other passenger inside, he stretched himself on the cushion of the back seat and gave way to moody reflections. He quite determined to leave Blazing Star, to settle himself seriously to the task of money-getting, and to return to his comrades, some day, a sarcastic, cynical, successful man, and so overwhelm them with confusion. For poor Cass had not yet reached that superiority of knowing that success would depend upon his ability to forego his past. Indeed, part of his boyhood had been cast among these men, and he was not old enough to have learned that success was not to be gauged by their standard. The moon lit up the dark interior of the coach with a faint

poetic light. The lazy swinging of the vehicle that was bearing him away, — albeit only for a night and a day, — the solitude, the glimpses from the window of great distances full of vague possibilities, made the abused ring potent as that of Gyges. He dreamed with his eyes open. From an Alnaschar vision he suddenly awoke. The coach had stopped. The voices of men, one in entreaty, one in expostulation, came from the box. Cass mechanically put his hand to his pistol pocket.

"Thank you, but I *insist* upon getting down."

It was Miss Porter's voice. This was followed by a rapid, half-restrained interchange of words between Hornsby and the driver. Then the latter said gruffly: —

"If the lady wants to ride inside, let her."

Miss Porter fluttered to the ground. She was followed by Hornsby. "Just a minit, miss," he expostulated, half shamedly, half brusquely, "ye don't onderstand me. I only" —

But Miss Porter had jumped into the coach.

Hornsby placed his hand on the handle of the door. Miss Porter grasped it firmly from the inside. There was a slight struggle.

All of which was part of a dream to the boyish Cass. But he awoke from it — a man! "Do you," he asked, in a voice he scarcely recognized himself, — "do you want this man inside?"

"No!"

Cass caught at Hornby's wrist like a young tiger. But alas! what availed instinctive chivalry against main strength? He only succeeded in forcing the door open in spite of Miss Porter's superior strategy, and — I fear I must add, muscle also — and threw himself passionately at Hornsby's throat, where he hung on and calmly awaited dissolution. But he had, in the onset, driven Hornsby out into the road and the moonlight.

"Here! somebody take my lines." The voice was "Mountain Charley's," the driver. The figure that jumped from the box and separated the struggling men belonged to this singularly direct person.

"You 're riding inside?" said Charley interrogatively, to Cass. Before he could reply Miss Porter's voice came from the window: —

"He is!"

Charley promptly bundled Cass into the coach.

"And *you!*" to Hornsby, "onless you 're kalkilatin' to take a little pasear you 're booked *outside*. Get up."

It is probable that Charley assisted Mr. Hornsby as promptly to his seat, for the next moment the coach was rolling on.

Meanwhile Cass, by reason of his forced entry, had been deposited in Miss Porter's lap, whence, freeing himself, he had attempted to climb over the middle seat, but in the starting of the coach was again thrown heavily against her hat and shoulder; all of which was inconsistent with the attitude of dignified reserve he had intended to display. Miss Porter, meanwhile, recovered her good humor.

"What a brute he was, ugh!" she said, re-tying the ribbons of her bonnet under her square chin, and smoothing out her linen duster.

Cass tried to look as if he had forgotten the whole affair. "Who? Oh, yes! I see!" he responded absently.

"I suppose I ought to thank you," she went on with a smile, "but you know, really, I could have kept him out if you had n't pulled his wrist from outside. I 'll show you. Look! Put your hand on the handle there! Now, I 'll hold the lock inside firmly. You see, you can't turn the catch!"

She indeed held the lock fast. It was a firm hand, yet

soft, — their fingers had touched over the handle, — and looked white in the moonlight. He made no reply, but sank back again in his seat with a singular sensation in the fingers that had touched hers. He was in the shadow, and, without being seen, could abandon his reserve and glance at her face. It struck him that he had never really seen her before. She was not so tall as she had appeared to be. Her eyes were not large, but her pupils were black, moist, velvety, and so convex as to seem embossed on the white. She had an indistinctive nose, a rather colorless face — whiter at the angles of the mouth and nose through the relief of tiny freckles like grains of pepper. Her mouth was straight, dark, red, but moist as her eyes. She had drawn herself into the corner of the back seat, her wrist put through and hanging over the swinging strap, the easy lines of her plump figure swaying from side to side with the motion of the coach. Finally, forgetful of any presence in the dark corner opposite, she threw her head a little farther back, slipped a trifle lower, and placing two well-booted feet upon the middle seat, completed a charming and wholesome picture.

Five minutes elapsed. She was looking straight at the moon. Cass Beard felt his dignified reserve becoming very much like awkwardness. He ought to be coldly polite.

"I hope you 're not flustered, miss, by the — by the" — he began.

"I?" She straightened herself up in the seat, cast a curious glance into the dark corner, and then, letting herself down again, said: "Oh dear, no!"

Another five minutes elapsed. She had evidently forgotten him. She might, at least, have been civil. He took refuge again in his reserve. But it was now mixed with a certain pique.

Yet how much softer her face looked in the moonlight! Even her square jaw had lost that hard, matter-of-fact,

practical indication which was so distasteful to him, and always had suggested a harsh criticism of his weakness. How moist her eyes were — actually shining in the light! How that light seemed to concentrate in the corners of the lashes, and then slipped — a flash — away! Was she? Yes, she was crying.

Cass melted. He moved. Miss Porter put her head out of the window and drew it back in a moment dry-eyed.

"One meets all sorts of folks traveling," said Cass, with what he wished to make appear a cheerful philosophy.

"I dare say. I don't know. I never before met any one who was rude to me. I have traveled all over the country alone, and with all kinds of people ever since I was so high. I have always gone my own way, without hindrance or trouble. I always do. I don't see why I should n't. Perhaps other people may n't like it. I do. I like excitement. I like to see all that there is to see. Because I 'm a girl I don't see why I can't go out without a keeper, and why I cannot do what any man can do that is n't wrong; do you? Perhaps you do — perhaps you don't. Perhaps you like a girl to be always in the house dawdling or thumping a piano or reading novels. Perhaps you think I 'm bold because I don't like it, and won't lie and say I do."

She spoke sharply and aggressively, and so evidently in answer to Cass's unspoken indictment against her, that he was not surprised when she became more direct.

"You know you were shocked when I went to fetch that Hornsby, the coroner, after we found the dead body."

"Hornsby was n't shocked," said Cass a little viciously.

"What do you mean?" she said abruptly.

"You were good friends enough until" —

"Until he insulted me just now; is that it?"

"Until he thought," stammered Cass, "that because you

were — you know — not so — so — so careful as other girls, he could be a little freer."

"And so, because I preferred to ride a mile with him to see something real that had happened, and tried to be useful instead of looking in shop windows in Main Street or promenading before the hotel" —

"And being ornamental," interrupted Cass. But this feeble and un-Cass-like attempt at playful gallantry met with a sudden check.

Miss Porter drew herself together, and looked out of the window. "Do you wish me to walk the rest of the way home?"

"No," said Cass hurriedly, with a crimson face and a sense of gratuitous rudeness.

"Then stop that kind of talk, right there!"

There was an awkward silence. "I wish I was a man," she said, half bitterly, half earnestly. Cass Beard was not old and cynical enough to observe that this devout aspiration is usually uttered by those who have least reason to deplore their own femininity; and, but for the rebuff he had just received, would have made the usual emphatic dissent of our sex, when the wish is uttered by warm red lips and tender voices — a dissent, it may be remarked, generally withheld, however, when the masculine spinster dwells on the perfection of woman. I dare say Miss Porter was sincere, for a moment later she continued, poutingly: —

"And yet I used to go to fires in Sacramento when I was only ten years old. I saw the theatre burnt down. Nobody found fault with me then."

Something made Cass ask if her father and mother objected to her boyish tastes. The reply was characteristic if not satisfactory: —

"Object? I'd like to see them do it!"

The direction of the road had changed. The fickle moon now abandoned Miss Porter and sought out Cass

on the front seat. It caressed the young fellow's silky mustache and long eyelashes, and took some of the sunburn from his cheek.

"What's the matter with your neck?" said the girl suddenly.

Cass looked down, blushing to find that the collar of his smart "duck" sailor shirt was torn open. But something more than his white, soft, girlish skin was exposed; the shirt front was dyed quite red with blood from a slight cut on the shoulder. He remembered to have felt a scratch while struggling with Hornsby.

The girl's soft eyes sparkled. "Let *me*," she said vivaciously. "Do! I'm good at wounds. Come over here. No — stay there. I'll come over to you."

She did, bestriding the back of the middle seat and dropping at his side. The magnetic fingers again touched his; he felt her warm breath on his neck as she bent toward him.

"It's nothing," he said hastily, more agitated by the treatment than the wound.

"Give me your flask," she responded, without heeding. A stinging sensation as she bathed the edges of the cut with the spirit brought him back to common sense again. "There," she said, skillfully extemporizing a bandage from her handkerchief and a compress from his cravat. "Now, button your coat over your chest, so, and don't take cold." She insisted upon buttoning it for him; greater even than the feminine delight in a man's strength is the ministration to his weakness. Yet, when this was finished, she drew a little away from him in some embarrassment — an embarrassment she wondered at, as his skin was finer, his touch gentler, his clothes cleaner, and — not to put too fine a point upon it — he exhaled an atmosphere much sweeter than belonged to most of the men her boyish habits had brought her in contact with — not excepting her own

father. Later she even exempted her mother from the possession of this divine effluence. After a moment she asked suddenly, "What are you going to do with Hornsby?"

Cass had not thought of him. His short-lived rage was past with the occasion that provoked it. Without any fear of his adversary, he would have been content — quite willing — to meet him no more. He only said, "That will depend upon him."

"Oh, you won't hear from him again," said she confidently; "but you really ought to get up a little more muscle. You've no more than a girl." She stopped, a little confused.

"What shall I do with your handkerchief?" asked the uneasy Cass, anxious to change the subject.

"Oh, keep it, if you want to; only don't show it to everybody as you did that ring you found." Seeing signs of distress in his face, she added: "Of course that was all nonsense. If you had cared so much for the ring you could n't have talked about it or shown it, could you?"

It relieved him to think that this might be true; he certainly had not looked at it in that light before.

"But did you really find it?" she asked, with sudden gravity. "Really, now?"

"Yes."

"And there was no real May in the case?"

"Not that I know of," laughed Cass, secretly pleased.

But Miss Porter, after eyeing him critically for a moment, jumped up and climbed back again to her seat. "Perhaps you had better give me that handkerchief back."

Cass began to unbutton his coat.

"No! no! Do you want to take your death of cold?" she screamed. And Cass, to avoid this direful possibility, rebuttoned his coat again over the handkerchief and a peculiarly pleasing sensation.

Very little now was said until the rattling, bounding descent of the coach denoted the approach to Red Chief. The straggling main street disclosed itself, light by light. In the flash of glittering windows and the sound of eager voices Miss Porter descended, without waiting for Cass's proffered assistance, and anticipated Mountain Charley's descent from the box. A few undistinguishable words passed between them.

"You kin freeze to me, miss," said Charley; and Miss Porter, turning her frank laugh and frankly opened palm to Cass, half returned the pressure of his hand and slipped away.

A few days after the stage-coach incident Mountain Charley drew up beside Cass on the Blazing Star turnpike, and handed him a small packet. "I was told to give ye that by Miss Porter. Hush — listen! It 's that rather old dog-goned ring o' yours that 's bin in all the papers. She 's bamboozled that sap-headed county judge, Boompointer, into givin' it to her. Take my advice and sling it away for some other feller to pick up and get looney over. That 's all!"

"Did she say anything?" asked Cass anxiously, as he received his lost treasure somewhat coldly.

"Well, yes! I reckon. She asked me to stand betwixt Hornsby and you. So don't *you* tackle him, and I 'll see *he* don't tackle you," and with a portentous wink Mountain Charley whipped up his horses, and was gone.

Cass opened the packet. It contained nothing but the ring. Unmitigated by any word of greeting, remembrance, or even raillery, it seemed almost an insult. Had she intended to flaunt his folly in his face, or had she believed he still mourned for it and deemed its recovery a sufficient reward for his slight service? For an instant he felt tempted to follow Charley's advice, and cast this symbol of folly and contempt in the dust of the mountain road.

And had she not made his humiliation complete by begging Charley's interference between him and his enemy? He would go home and send her back the handkerchief she had given him. But here the unromantic reflection that although he had washed it that very afternoon in the solitude of his own cabin, he could not possibly iron it, but must send it "rough dried," stayed his indignant feet.

Two or three days, a week, a fortnight even, of this hopeless resentment filled Cass's breast. Then the news of Kanaka Joe's acquittal in the state court momentarily revived the story of the ring, and revamped a few stale jokes in the camp. But the interest soon flagged; the fortunes of the little community of Blazing Star had been for some months failing; and with early snows in the mountain and wasted capital in fruitless schemes on the river, there was little room for the indulgence of that lazy and original humor which belonged to their lost youth and prosperity. Blazing Star truly, in the grim figure of their slang, was "played out." Not dug out, worked out, or washed out, but dissipated in a year of speculation and chance.

Against this tide of fortune Cass struggled manfully, and even evoked the slow praise of his companions. Better still, he won a certain praise for himself, in himself, in a consciousness of increased strength, health, power, and self-reliance. He began to turn his quick imagination and perception to some practical account, and made one or two discoveries which quite startled his more experienced but more conservative companions. Nevertheless, Cass's discoveries and labors were not of a kind that produced immediate pecuniary realization, and Blazing Star, which consumed so many pounds of pork and flour daily, did not unfortunately produce the daily equivalent in gold. Blazing Star lost its credit. Blazing Star was hungry, dirty, and ragged. Blazing Star was beginning to set.

Participating in the general ill luck of the camp, Cass was not without his own individual mischance. He had resolutely determined to forget Miss Porter and all that tended to recall the unlucky ring, but, cruelly enough, she was the only thing that refused to be forgotten — whose undulating figure reclined opposite to him in the weird moonlight of his ruined cabin, whose voice mingled with the song of the river by whose banks he toiled, and whose eyes and touch thrilled him in his dreams. Partly for this reason, and partly because his clothes were beginning to be patched and torn, he avoided Red Chief and any place where he would be likely to meet her. In spite of this precaution he had once seen her driving in a pony carriage, but so smartly and fashionably dressed that he drew back in the cover of a wayside willow that she might pass without recognition. He looked down upon his red-splashed clothes and grimy, soil-streaked hands, and for a moment half hated her. His comrades seldom spoke of her — instinctively fearing some temptation that might beset his Spartan resolutions, but he heard from time to time that she had been seen at balls and parties, apparently enjoying those very frivolities of her sex she affected to condemn. It was a Sabbath morning in early spring that he was returning from an ineffectual attempt to enlist a capitalist at the county town to redeem the fortunes of Blazing Star. He was pondering over the narrowness of that capitalist, who had evidently but illogically connected Cass's present appearance with the future of that struggling camp, when he became so footsore that he was obliged to accept a "lift" from a wayfaring teamster. As the slowly lumbering vehicle passed the new church on the outskirts of the town, the congregation were sallying forth. It was too late to jump down and run away, and Cass dared not ask his new-found friend to whip up his cattle. Conscious of his unshorn beard and ragged garments, he kept his eyes

fixed upon the road. A voice that thrilled him called his name. It was Miss Porter, a resplendent vision of silk, laces, and Easter flowers — yet actually running, with something of her old dash and freedom, beside the wagon. As the astonished teamster drew up before this elegant apparition, she panted: —

"Why did you make me run so far, and why did n't you look up?"

Cass, trying to hide the patches on his knees beneath a newspaper, stammered that he had not seen her.

"And you did not hold down your head purposely?"

"No," said Cass.

"Why have you not been to Red Chief? Why did n't you answer my message about the ring?" she asked swiftly.

"You sent nothing but the ring," said Cass, coloring, as he glanced at the teamster.

"Why, *that* was a message, you born idiot."

Cass stared. The teamster smiled. Miss Porter gazed anxiously at the wagon. "I think I 'd like a ride in there; it looks awfully good." She glanced mischievously around at the lingering and curious congregation. "May I?"

But Cass deprecated that proceeding strongly. It was dirty; he was not sure it was even *wholesome;* she would be *so* uncomfortable; he himself was only going a few rods farther, and in that time she might ruin her dress —

"Oh, yes," she said a little bitterly, "certainly, my dress must be looked after. And — what else?"

"People might think it strange, and believe I had invited you," continued Cass hesitatingly.

"When I had only invited myself? Thank you. Good-by."

She waved her hand and stepped back from the wagon. Cass would have given worlds to recall her, but he sat

still, and the vehicle moved on in moody silence. At the first cross-road he jumped down. "Thank you," he said to the teamster. "You're welcome," returned that gentleman, regarding him curiously; "but the next time a gal like that asks to ride in this yer wagon, I reckon I won't take the vote of any deadhead passenger. Adios, young fellow. Don't stay out late; ye might be run off by some gal, and what would your mother say?" Of course the young man could only look unutterable things and walk away, but even in that dignified action he was conscious that its effect was somewhat mitigated by a large patch from a material originally used as a flour-sack, which had repaired his trousers, but still bore the ironical legend, "Best Superfine."

The summer brought warmth and promise and some blossom, if not absolute fruition to Blazing Star. The long days drew Nature into closer communion with the men, and hopefulness followed the discontent of their winter seclusion. It was easier, too, for Capital to be wooed and won into making a picnic in these mountain solitudes than when high water stayed the fords, and drifting snow the Sierran trails. At the close of one of these Arcadian days Cass was smoking before the door of his lonely cabin when he was astounded by the onset of a dozen of his companions. Peter Drummond, far in the van, was waving a newspaper like a victorious banner. "All's right now, Cass, old man!" he panted as he stopped before Cass and shoved back his eager followers.

"What's all right?" asked Cass dubiously.

"*You!* You kin rake down the pile now. You're hunky! You're on velvet. Listen!"

He opened the newspaper and read with annoying deliberation, as follows: —

"LOST. — If the finder of a plain gold ring, bearing the engraved inscription, 'May to Cass,' alleged to have

been picked up on the highroad near Blazing Star on the 4th March, 186–, will apply to Bookham & Sons, bankers, 1007 Y Street, Sacramento, he will be suitably rewarded either for the recovery of the ring, or for such facts as may identify it, or the locality where it was found."

Cass rose and frowned savagely on his comrades. "No! no!" cried a dozen voices assuringly. "It 's all right! Honest Injun! True as gospel! No joke, Cass!"

"Here 's the paper, Sacramento 'Union' of yesterday. Look for yourself," said Drummond, handing him the well-worn journal. "And you see," he added, "how darned lucky you are. It ain't necessary for you to produce the ring, so if that old biled owl of a Boompointer don't giv' it back to ye, it 's all the same."

"And they say nobody but the finder need apply," interrupted another. "That shuts out Boompointer or Kanaka Joe for the matter o' that."

"It 's clar that it *means* you, Cass, ez much ez if they 'd given your name," added a third.

For Miss Porter's sake and his own Cass had never told them of the restoration of the ring, and it was evident that Mountain Charley had also kept silent. Cass could not speak now without violating a secret, and he was pleased that the ring itself no longer played an important part in the mystery. But what was that mystery, and why was the ring secondary to himself? Why was so much stress laid upon his finding it?

"You see," said Drummond, as if answering his unspoken thought, "that ar gal — for it is a gal in course — hez read all about it in the papers, and hez sort o' took a shine to ye. It don't make a bit o' difference who in thunder Cass *is* or *waz*, for I reckon she 's kicked him over by this time" —

"Sarved him right, too, for losing the girl's ring and

then lying low and keeping dark about it," interrupted a sympathizer.

"And she's just weakened over the romantic, high-toned way you stuck to it," continued Drummond, forgetting the sarcasms he had previously hurled at this romance. Indeed the whole camp, by this time, had become convinced that it had fostered and developed a chivalrous devotion which was now on the point of pecuniary realization. It was generally accepted that "she" was the daughter of this banker, and also felt that in the circumstances the happy father could not do less than develop the resources of Blazing Star at once. Even if there were no relationship, what opportunity could be more fit for presenting to capital a locality that even produced engagement rings, and, as Jim Fauquier put it, "the men ez knew how to keep 'em." It was this sympathetic Virginian who took Cass aside with the following generous suggestion: "If you find that you and the old gal could n't hitch hosses, owin' to your not likin' red hair or a game leg" (it may be here recorded that Blazing Star had, for no reason whatever, attributed these unprepossessing qualities to the mysterious advertiser), "you might let *me* in. You might say ez how I used to jest worship that ring with you, and allers wanted to borrow it on Sundays. If anything comes of it — why — *we 're pardners!*"

A serious question was the outfitting of Cass for what now was felt to be a diplomatic representation of the community. His garments, it hardly need be said, were inappropriate to any wooing except that of the "maiden all forlorn," which the advertiser clearly was not. "He might," suggested Fauquier, "drop in jest as he is — kinder as if he 'd got keerless of the world, being lovesick." But Cass objected strongly, and was borne out in his objection by his younger comrades. At last a pair of white duck trousers,

a red shirt, a flowing black silk scarf, and a Panama hat were procured at Red Chief, on credit, after a judicious exhibition of the advertisement. A heavy wedding-ring, the property of Drummond (who was not married), was also lent as a graceful suggestion, and at the last moment Fauquier affixed to Cass's scarf an enormous specimen pin of gold and quartz. "It sorter indicates the auriferous wealth o' this yer region, and the old man (the senior member of Bookham & Sons) need n't know I won it at draw-poker in Frisco," said Fauquier. "Ef you 'pass' on the gal, you kin hand it back to me and *I*'ll try it on."

Forty dollars for expenses was put into Cass's hands, and the entire community accompanied him to the cross-roads where he was to meet the Sacramento coach, which eventually carried him away, followed by a benediction of waving hats and exploding revolvers.

That Cass did not participate in the extravagant hopes of his comrades, and that he rejected utterly their matrimonial speculations in his behalf, need not be said. Outwardly, he kept his own counsel with good-humored assent. But there was something fascinating in the situation, and while he felt he had forever abandoned his romantic dream, he was not displeased to know that it might have proved a reality. Nor was it distasteful to him to think that Miss Porter would hear of it and regret her late inability to appreciate his sentiment. If he really were the object of some opulent maiden's passion, he would show Miss Porter how he could sacrifice the most brilliant prospects for her sake. Alone, on the top of the coach, he projected one of those satisfying conversations in which imaginative people delight, but which unfortunately never come quite up to rehearsal. "Dear Miss Porter," he would say, addressing the back of the driver, "if I could remain faithful to a dream of my youth, however illusive and unreal, can you believe that for the sake of lucre I could be false to the

one real passion that alone supplanted it?" In the composition and delivery of this eloquent statement an hour was happily forgotten: the only drawback to its complete effect was that a misplacing of epithets in rapid repetition did not seem to make the slightest difference, and Cass found himself saying, "Dear Miss Porter, if I could be false to a dream of my youth, etc., etc., can you believe I could be *faithful* to the one real passion," etc., etc., with equal and perfect satisfaction. As Miss Porter was reputed to be well off, if the unknown were poor, that might be another drawback.

The banking house of Bookham & Sons did not present an illusive nor mysterious appearance. It was eminently practical and matter of fact; it was obtrusively open and glassy; nobody would have thought of leaving a secret there, that would have been inevitably circulated over the counter. Cass felt an uncomfortable sense of incongruity in himself, in his story, in his treasure, to this temple of disenchanting realism. With the awkwardness of an embarrassed man he was holding prominently in his hand an envelope containing the ring and advertisement as a voucher for his intrusion, when the nearest clerk took the envelope from his hand, opened it, took out the ring, returned it, said briskly, "T' other shop, next door, young man," and turned to another customer.

Cass stepped to the door, saw that "t'other shop" was a pawnbroker's, and returned again with a flashing eye and heightened color. "It's an advertisement I have come to answer," he began again.

The clerk cast a glance at Cass's scarf and pin. "Place taken yesterday — no room for any more," he said abruptly.

Cass grew quite white. But his old experience in Blazing Star repartee stood him in good stead. "If it's *your* place you mean," he said coolly, "I reckon you

might put a dozen men in the hole you're rattlin' round in — but it's this advertisement I'm after. If Bookham is n't in, maybe you 'll send me one of the grown-up sons." The production of the advertisement and some laughter from the bystanders had its effect. The pert young clerk retired, and returned to lead the way to the bank parlor. Cass's heart sank again as he was confronted by a dark, iron-gray man — in dress, features, speech, and action uncompromisingly opposed to Cass, his ring and his romance. When the young man had told his story and produced his treasure he paused. The banker scarcely glanced at it, but said impatiently : —

"Well, your papers ? "

"My papers ? "

"Yes. Proof of your identity. You say your name is Cass Beard. Good ! What have you got to prove it ? How can I tell who you are ? "

To a sensitive man there is no form of suspicion that is as bewildering and demoralizing at the moment as the question of his identity. Cass felt the insult in the doubt of his word, and the palpable sense of his present inability to prove it. The banker watched him keenly but not unkindly.

"Come," he said at length, "this is not my affair; if you can legally satisfy the lady for whom I am only agent, well and good. I believe you can ; I only warn you that you must. And my present inquiry was to keep her from losing her time with impostors, a class I don't think you belong to. There 's her card. Good-day."

"Miss Mortimer."

It was *not* the banker's daughter. The first illusion of Blazing Star was rudely dispelled. But the care taken by the capitalist to shield her from imposture indicated a person of wealth. Of her youth and beauty Cass no longer thought.

The address given was not distant. With a beating heart he rung the bell of a respectable-looking house, and was ushered into a private drawing-room. Instinctively he felt that the room was only temporarily inhabited, an air peculiar to the best lodgings; and when the door opened upon a tall lady in deep mourning, he was still more convinced of an incongruity between the occupant and her surroundings. With a smile that vacillated between a habit of familiarity and ease and a recent restraint, she motioned him to a chair.

"Miss Mortimer" was still young, still handsome, still fashionably dressed, and still attractive. From her first greeting to the end of the interview Cass felt that she knew all about him. This relieved him from the onus of proving his identity, but seemed to put him vaguely at a disadvantage. It increased his sense of inexperience and youthfulness.

"I hope you will believe," she began, "that the few questions I have to ask you are to satisfy my own heart, and for no other purpose." She smiled sadly as she went on. "Had it been otherwise, I should have instituted a legal inquiry, and left this interview to some one cooler, calmer, and less interested than myself. But I think, I *know* I can trust you. Perhaps we women are weak and foolish to talk of an *instinct*, and when you know my story you may have reason to believe that but little dependence can be placed on *that;* but I am not wrong in saying — am I?" (with a sad smile) "that *you* are not above that weakness?" She paused, closed her lips tightly, and clasped her hands before her. "You say you found that ring in the road some three months before — the — the — you know what I mean — the body — was discovered?"

"Yes."

"You thought it might have been dropped by some one in passing?"

"I thought so, yes — it belonged to no one in the camp."

"Before your cabin, or on the highway?"

"Before my cabin."

"You are *sure?*" There was something so very sweet and sad in her smile that it oddly made Cass color.

"But my cabin is near the road," he suggested.

"I see! And there was nothing else, no paper nor envelope?"

"Nothing."

"And you kept it because of the odd resemblance one of the names bore to yours?"

"Yes."

"For no other reason?"

"None." Yet Cass felt he was blushing.

"You 'll forgive my repeating a question you have already answered, but I am *so* anxious. There was some attempt to prove at the inquest that the ring had been found on the body of — the unfortunate man. But you tell me it was not so?"

"I can swear it."

"Good God — the traitor!" She took a hurried step forward, turned to the window, and then came back to Cass with a voice broken with emotion. "I have told you I could trust you. That ring was mine!"

She stopped, and then went on hurriedly. "Years ago I gave it to a man who deceived and wronged me; a man whose life since then has been a shame and disgrace to all who knew him; a man who, once a gentleman, sank so low as to become the associate of thieves and ruffians; sank so low, that when he died, by violence, — a traitor even to them, — his own confederates shrank from him, and left him to fill a nameless grave. That man 's body you found!"

Cass started. "And his name was" —

"Part of your surname. Cass — Henry Cass."

"You see why Providence seems to have brought that ring to you," she went on. "But you ask me why, knowing this, I am so eager to know if the ring was found by you in the road, or if it were found on his body. Listen! It is part of my mortification that the story goes that this man once showed this ring, boasted of it, staked, and lost it at a gambling-table to one of his vile comrades."

"Kanaka Joe," said Cass, overcome by a vivid recollection of Joe's merriment at the trial.

"The same. Don't you see," she said hurriedly, "if the ring had been found on him I could believe that somewhere in his heart he still kept respect for the woman he had wronged. I am a woman — a foolish woman, I know — but you have crushed that hope forever."

"But why have you sent for me?" asked Cass, touched by her emotion.

"To know it for certain," she said almost fiercely. "Can you not understand that a woman like me must know a thing once and forever? But you *can* help me. I did not send for you only to pour my wrongs in your ears. You must take me with you to this place — to the spot where you found the ring — to the spot where you found the body — to the spot where — where *he* lies. You must do it secretly, that none shall know me."

Cass hesitated. He was thinking of his companions and the collapse of their painted bubble. How could he keep the secret from them?

"If it is money you need, let not that stop you. I have no right to your time without recompense. Do not misunderstand me. There has been a thousand dollars awaiting my order at Bookham's when the ring should be delivered. It shall be doubled if you help me in this last moment."

It was possible. He could convey her safely there, in-

vent some story of a reward delayed for want of proofs, and afterward share that reward with his friends. He answered promptly, "I will take you there."

She took his hands in both of hers, raised them to her lips, and smiled. The shadow of grief and restraint seemed to have fallen from her face, and a half-mischievous, half-coquettish gleam in her dark eyes touched the susceptible Cass in so subtle a fashion that he regained the street in some confusion. He wondered what Miss Porter would have thought. But was he not returning to her, a fortunate man, with one thousand dollars in his pocket! Why should he remember he was handicapped by a pretty woman and a pathetic episode? It did not make the proximity less pleasant as he helped her into the coach that evening, nor did the recollection of another ride with another woman obtrude itself upon those consolations which he felt it his duty from time to time to offer. It was arranged that he should leave her at the Red Chief hotel, while he continued on to Blazing Star, returning at noon to bring her with him when he could do it without exposing her to recognition. The gray dawn came soon enough, and the coach drew up at Red Chief while the lights in the bar-room and dining-room of the hotel were still struggling with the far flushing east. Cass alighted, placed Miss Mortimer in the hands of the landlady, and returned to the vehicle. It was still musty, close, and frouzy, with half-awakened passengers. There was a vacated seat on the top, which Cass climbed up to, and abstractedly threw himself beside a figure muffled in shawls and rugs. There was a slight movement among the multitudinous enwrappings, and then the figure turned to him and said dryly, "Good-morning!" It was Miss Porter!

"Have you been long here?" he stammered.

"All night."

He would have given worlds to leave her at that mo-

ment. He would have jumped from the starting coach to save himself any explanation of the embarrassment he was furiously conscious of showing, without, as he believed, any adequate cause. And yet, like all inexperienced, sensitive men, he dashed blindly into that explanation; worse, he even told his secret at once, then and there, and then sat abashed and conscience-stricken, with an added sense of its utter futility.

"And this," summed up the young girl, with a slight shrug of her pretty shoulders, "is *your May?*"

Cass would have recommenced his story.

"No, don't, pray! It is n't interesting, nor original. Do *you* believe it?"

"I do," said Cass indignantly.

"How lucky! Then let me go to sleep."

Cass, still furious, but uneasy, did not again address her. When the coach stopped at Blazing Star she asked him indifferently: "When does this sentimental pilgrimage begin?"

"I return for her at one o'clock," replied Cass stiffly.

He kept his word. He appeased his eager companions with a promise of future fortune, and exhibited the present and tangible reward. By a circuitous route known only to himself, he led Miss Mortimer to the road before the cabin. There was a pink flush of excitement on her somewhat faded cheek.

"And it was here?" she asked eagerly.

"I found it here."

"And the body?"

"That was afterward. Over in that direction, beyond the clump of buckeyes, on the Red Chief turnpike."

"And any one coming from the road we left just now and going to — to — that place would have to cross just here? Tell me," she said, with a strange laugh, laying her cold nervous hand on his, "would n't they?"

"They would."

"Let us go to that place."

Cass stepped out briskly to avoid observation and gain the woods beyond the highway. "You have crossed here before," she said. "There seems to be a trail."

"I may have made it: it 's a short cut to the buckeyes."

"You never found anything else on the trail?"

"You remember, I told you before, the ring was all I found."

"Ah, true!" she smiled sweetly; "it was *that* which made it seem so odd to you. I forgot."

In half an hour they reached the buckeyes. During the walk she had taken rapid recognizance of everything in her path. When they crossed the road and Cass had pointed out the scene of the murder, she looked anxiously around. "You are sure we are not seen?"

"Quite."

"You will not think me foolish if I ask you to wait here while I go in there" — she pointed to the ominous thicket near them — "alone?" She was quite white.

Cass's heart, which had grown somewhat cold since his interview with Miss Porter, melted at once.

"Go; I will stay here."

He waited five minutes. She did not return. What if the poor creature had determined upon suicide on the spot where her faithless lover had fallen? He was reassured in another moment by the rustle of skirts in the undergrowth.

"I was becoming quite alarmed," he said aloud.

"You have reason to be," returned a hurried voice. He started. It was Miss Porter, who stepped swiftly out of the cover. "Look," she said, "look at that man down the road. He has been tracking you two ever since you left the cabin. Do you know who he is?"

"No!"

"Then listen. It is three-fingered Dick, one of the escaped road agents. I know him!"

"Let us go and warn her," said Cass eagerly.

Miss Porter laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"I don't think she'll thank you," she said dryly. "Perhaps you'd better see what she's doing, first."

Utterly bewildered, yet with a strong sense of the masterfulness of his companion, he followed her. She crept like a cat through the thicket. Suddenly she paused. "Look!" she whispered viciously; "look at the tender vigils of your heart-broken May!"

Cass saw the woman, who had left him a moment before, on her knees on the grass, with long thin fingers digging like a ghoul in the earth. He had scarce time to notice her eager face and eyes, cast now and then back toward the spot where she had left him, before there was a crash in the bushes, and a man — the stranger of the road — leaped to her side. "Run," he said; "run for it now. You're watched!"

"Oh! that man — Beard!" she said contemptuously.

"No, another in a wagon. Quick. Fool, you know the place now, — you can come later; run!" And half dragging, half lifting her, he bore her through the bushes. Scarcely had they closed behind the pair when Miss Porter ran to the spot vacated by the woman. "Look!" she cried triumphantly; "look!"

Cass looked, and sank on his knees beside her.

"It *was* worth a thousand dollars, was n't it?" she repeated maliciously, "was n't it? But you ought to return it! *Really* you ought."

Cass could scarcely articulate. "But how did *you* know it?" he finally gasped.

"Oh, I suspected something; there was a woman, and you know you're *such* a fool!"

Cass rose stiffly.

"Don't be a greater fool now, but go and bring my horse and wagon from the hill, and don't say anything to the driver."

"Then you did not come alone?"

"No; it would have been bold and improper."

"Please!"

"And to think it *was* the ring, after all, that pointed to this," she said.

"The ring that *you* returned to me."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing."

"Don't, please, the wagon is coming."

. . . . . .

In the next morning's edition of the "Red Chief Chronicle" appeared the following startling intelligence: —

EXTRAORDINARY DISCOVERY!

FINDING OF THE STOLEN TREASURE OF WELLS, FARGO & CO. OVER $300,000 RECOVERED.

Our readers will remember the notorious robbery of Wells, Fargo & Co.'s treasure from the Sacramento and Red Chief Pioneer Coach on the night of September 1. Although most of the gang were arrested, it is known that two escaped, who, it was presumed, cached the treasure, amounting to nearly $500,000 in gold, drafts, and jewelry, as no trace of the property was found. Yesterday our esteemed fellow citizen, Mr. Cass Beard, long and favorably known in this county, succeeded in exhuming the treasure in a copse of hazel near the Red Chief turnpike — adjacent to the spot where an unknown body was lately discovered. This body is now strongly suspected to be that of one Henry Cass, a disreputable character, who has since been ascertained to have been one of the road agents

who escaped. The matter is now under legal investigation. The successful result of the search is due to a systematic plan evolved from the genius of Mr. Beard, who has devoted over a year to this labor. It was first suggested to him by the finding of a ring, now definitely identified as part of the treasure which was supposed to have been dropped from Wells, Fargo & Co.'s boxes by the robbers in their midnight flight through Blazing Star.

In the same journal appeared the no less important intelligence, which explains, while it completes, this veracious chronicle: —

It is rumored that a marriage is shortly to take place between the hero of the late treasure discovery and a young lady of Red Chief, whose devoted aid and assistance to this important work is well known to this community.

AT THE MISSION OF SAN CARMEL

PROLOGUE

It was noon of the 10th of August, 1838. The monotonous coast line between Monterey and San Diego had set its hard outlines against the steady glare of the Californian sky and the metallic glitter of the Pacific Ocean. The weary succession of rounded, dome-like hills obliterated all sense of distance; the rare whaling vessel or still rarer trader, drifting past, saw no change in these rusty undulations, barren of distinguishing peak or headland, and bald of wooded crest or timbered ravine. The withered ranks of wild oats gave a dull procession of uniform color to the hills, unbroken by any relief of shadow in their smooth, round curves. As far as the eye could reach, sea and shore met in one bleak monotony, flecked by no passing cloud, stirred by no sign of life or motion. Even sound was absent; the Angelus, rung from the invisible Mission tower far inland, was driven back again by the steady northwest trades, that for half the year had swept the coast line and left it abraded of all umbrage and color.

But even this monotony soon gave way to a change and another monotony as uniform and depressed. The western horizon, slowly contracting before a wall of vapor, by four o'clock had become a mere cold, steely strip of sea, into which gradually the northern trend of the coast faded and was lost. As the fog stole with soft step southward, all distance, space, character, and locality again vanished; the hills upon which the sun still shone bore the same monot-

onous outlines as those just wiped into space. Last of all, before the red sun sank like the descending Host, it gleamed upon the sails of a trading vessel close in shore. It was the last object visible. A damp breath breathed upon it, a soft hand passed over the slate, the sharp penciling of the picture faded and became a confused gray cloud.

The wind and waves, too, went down in the fog; the now invisible and hushed breakers occasionally sent the surf over the sand in a quick whisper, with grave intervals of silence, but with no continuous murmur as before. In a curving bight of the shore the creaking of oars in their rowlocks began to be distinctly heard, but the boat itself, although apparently only its length from the sands, was invisible.

"Steady now; way enough!" The voice came from the sea, and was low, as if unconsciously affected by the fog. "Silence!"

The sound of a keel grating the sand was followed by the order, "Stern all!" from the invisible speaker.

"Shall we beach her?" asked another vague voice.

"Not yet. Hail again, and all together."

"Ah hoy — oi — oi — oy!"

There were four voices, but the hail appeared weak and ineffectual, like a cry in a dream, and seemed hardly to reach beyond the surf before it was suffocated in the creeping cloud. A silence followed, but no response.

"It 's no use to beach her and go ashore until we find the boat," said the first voice gravely; "and we 'll do that if the current has brought her here. Are you sure you 've got the right bearings?"

"As near as a man could off a shore with not a blasted p'int to take his bearings by."

There was a long silence again, broken only by the occasional dip of oars, keeping the invisible boat-head to the sea.

"Take my word for it, lads, it 's the last we 'll see of that boat again, or of Jack Cranch, or the captain's baby."

"It *does* look mighty queer that the painter should slip. Jack Cranch ain't the man to tie a granny knot."

"Silence!" said the invisible leader. "Listen."

A hail, so faint and uncertain that it might have been the long-deferred, far-off echo of their own, came from the sea, abreast of them.

"It's the captain. He has n't found anything, or he could n't be so far north. Hark!"

The hail was repeated again faintly, dreamily. To the seamen's trained ears it seemed to have an intelligent significance, for the first voice gravely responded, "Aye, aye!" and then said softly, "Oars."

The word was followed by a splash. The oars clicked sharply and simultaneously in the rowlocks, then more faintly, then still fainter, and then passed out into the darkness.

The silence and shadow both fell together; for hours sea and shore were impenetrable. Yet at times the air was softly moved and troubled, the surrounding gloom faintly lightened as with a misty dawn, and then was dark again; or drowsy, far-off cries and confused noises seemed to grow out of the silence, and, when they had attracted the weary ear, sank away as in a mocking dream, and showed themselves unreal. Nebulous gatherings in the fog seemed to indicate stationary objects that, even as one gazed, moved away; the recurring lap and ripple on the shingle sometimes took upon itself the semblance of faint articulate laughter or spoken words. But towards morning a certain monotonous grating on the sand, that had for many minutes alternately cheated and piqued the ear, asserted itself more strongly, and a moving, vacillating shadow in the gloom became an opaque object on the shore.

With the first rays of the morning light the fog lifted. As the undraped hills one by one bared their cold bosoms to the sun, the long line of coast struggled back to life

again. Everything was unchanged, except that a stranded boat lay upon the sands, and in its stern-sheets a sleeping child.

I

The 10th of August, 1852, brought little change to the dull monotony of wind, fog, and treeless coast line. Only the sea was occasionally flecked with racing-sails that outstripped the old, slow-creeping trader, or was at times streaked and blurred with the trailing smoke of a steamer. There were a few strange footprints on those virgin sands, and a fresh track, that led from the beach over the rounded hills, dropped into the bosky recesses of a hidden valley beyond the coast range.

It was here that the refectory windows of the Mission of San Carmel had for years looked upon the reverse of that monotonous picture presented to the sea. It was here that the trade-winds, shorn of their fury and strength in the heated, oven-like air that rose from the valley, lost their weary way in the tangled recesses of the wooded slopes, and breathed their last at the foot of the stone cross before the Mission. It was on the crest of those slopes that the fog halted and walled in the sun-illumined plain below; it was in this plain that limitless fields of grain clothed the flat adobe soil; here the Mission garden smiled over its hedges of fruitful vines, and through the leaves of fig and gnarled pear trees; and it was here that Father Pedro had lived for fifty years, found the prospect good, and had smiled also.

Father Pedro's smile was rare. He was not a Las Casas, nor a Junipero Serra, but he had the deep seriousness of all disciples laden with the responsible wording of a gospel not their own. And his smile had an ecclesiastical as well as a human significance, the pleasantest object in his prospect

being the fair and curly head of his boy acolyte and chorister, Francisco, which appeared among the vines, and his sweetest pastoral music, the high soprano humming of a chant with which the boy accompanied his gardening.

Suddenly the acolyte's chant changed to a cry of terror. Running rapidly to Father Pedro's side, he grasped his sotana, and even tried to hide his curls among its folds.

"'St! 'st!" said the padre, disengaging himself with some impatience. "What new alarm is this? Is it Luzbel hiding among our Catalan vines, or one of those heathen Americanos from Monterey? Speak!"

"Neither, holy father," said the boy, the color struggling back into his pale cheeks, and an apologetic, bashful smile lighting his clear eyes. "Neither; but oh! such a gross, lethargic toad! And it almost leaped upon me."

"A toad leaped upon thee!" repeated the good father with evident vexation. "What next? I tell thee, child, those foolish fears are most unmeet for thee, and must be overcome, if necessary, with prayer and penance. Frightened by a toad! Blood of the Martyrs! 'T is like any foolish girl!"

Father Pedro stopped and coughed.

"I am saying that no Christian child should shrink from any of God's harmless creatures. And only last week thou wast disdainful of poor Murieta's pig, forgetting that San Antonio himself did elect one his faithful companion, even in glory."

"Yes, but it was so fat, and so uncleanly, holy father," replied the young acolyte, "and it smelt so."

"Smelt so?" echoed the father doubtfully. "Have a care, child, that this is not luxuriousness of the senses. I have noticed of late you gather overmuch of roses and syringa, excellent in their way and in moderation, but still not to be compared with the flower of Holy Church, the lily."

"But lilies don't look well on the refectory table and against the adobe wall," returned the acolyte, with a pout of a spoilt child; "and surely the flowers cannot help being sweet, any more than myrrh or incense. And I am not frightened of the heathen Americanos either, *now*. There was a small one in the garden yesterday, a boy like me, and he spoke kindly and with a pleasant face."

"What said he to thee, child?" asked Father Pedro anxiously.

"Nay, the matter of his speech I could not understand," laughed the boy, "but the manner was as gentle as thine, holy father."

"'St, child," said the padre impatiently. "Thy likings are as unreasonable as thy fears. Besides, have I not told thee it ill becomes a child of Christ to chatter with those sons of Belial? But canst thou not repeat the words, — the *words* he said?" he continued suspiciously.

"'T is a harsh tongue the Americanos speak in their throat," replied the boy. "But he said 'devilishnisse' and 'pretty-as-a-girl,' and looked at me."

The good father made the boy repeat the words gravely, and as gravely repeated them after him with infinite simplicity. "They are but heretical words," he replied, in answer to the boy's inquiring look; "it is well you understand not English. Enough. Run away, child, and be ready for the Angelus. I will commune with myself awhile under the pear-trees."

Glad to escape so easily, the young acolyte disappeared down the alley of fig-trees, not without a furtive look at the patches of chickweed around their roots, the possible ambuscade of creeping or saltant vermin. The good priest heaved a sigh and glanced round the darkening prospect. The sun had already disappeared over the mountain wall that lay between him and the sea, rimmed with a faint white line of outlying fog. A cool zephyr fanned his

cheek, — it was the dying breath of the *vientos generales* beyond the wall. As Father Pedro's eyes were raised to this barrier, which seemed to shut out the boisterous world beyond, he fancied he noticed for the first time a slight breach in the parapet, over which an advanced banner of the fog was fluttering. Was it an omen? His speculations were cut short by a voice at his very side.

He turned quickly and beheld one of those "heathens" against whom he had just warned his young acolyte; one of that straggling band of adventurers whom the recent gold discoveries had scattered along the coast. Luckily the fertile alluvium of these valleys, lying parallel with the sea, offered no "indications" to attract the gold-seekers. Nevertheless, to Father Pedro even the infrequent contact with the Americanos was objectionable: they were at once inquisitive and careless; they asked questions with the sharp perspicacity of controversy; they received his grave replies with the frank indifference of utter worldliness. Powerful enough to have been tyrannical oppressors, they were singularly tolerant and gentle, contenting themselves with a playful, good-natured irreverence, which tormented the good father more than opposition. They were felt to be dangerous and subversive.

The Americano, however, who stood before him did not offensively suggest these national qualities. A man of middle height, strongly built, bronzed and slightly gray from the vicissitudes of years and exposure, he had an air of practical seriousness that commended itself to Father Pedro. To his religious mind it suggested self-consciousness; expressed in the dialect of the stranger, it only meant "business."

"I 'm rather glad I found you out here alone," began the latter; "it saves time. I have n't got to take my turn with the rest in there," — he indicated the church with his thumb, — "and you have n't got to make an appointment

You have got a clear forty minutes before the Angelus rings," he added, consulting a large silver chronometer, "and I reckon I kin git through my part of the job inside of twenty, leaving you ten minutes for remarks. I want to confess."

Father Pedro drew back with a gesture of dignity. The stranger, however, laid his hand upon the padre's sleeve with the air of a man anticipating objection, but never refusal, and went on.

"Of course, I know. You want me to come at some other time, and in *there*. You want it in the reg'lar style. That's your way and your time. My answer is: it ain't *my* way and *my* time. The main idea of confession, I take it, is gettin' at the facts. I'm ready to give 'em if you 'll take 'em out here, now. If you 're willing to drop the church and confessional, and all that sort o' thing, I, on my side, am willing to give up the absolution, and all that sort o' thing. You might," he added, with an unconscious touch of pathos in the suggestion, "heave in a word or two of advice after I get through; for instance, what *you* 'd do in the circumstances, you see! That 's all. But that 's as you please. It ain't part of the business."

Irreverent as this speech appeared, there was really no trace of such intention in his manner, and his evident profound conviction that his suggestion was practical, and not at all inconsistent with ecclesiastical dignity, would alone have been enough to touch the padre, had not the stranger's dominant personality already overridden him. He hesitated. The stranger seized the opportunity to take his arm, and lead him with the half familiarity of powerful protection to a bench beneath the refectory window. Taking out his watch again, he put it in the passive hands of the astonished priest, saying, "Time me," cleared his throat, and began: —

"Fourteen years ago there was a ship cruisin' in the

Pacific, jest off this range, that was ez nigh on to a hell afloat as anything rigged kin be. If a chap managed to dodge the cap'en's belaying-pin for a time he was bound to be fetched up in the ribs at last by the mate's boots. There was a chap knocked down the fore hatch with a broken leg in the Gulf, and another jumped overboard off Cape Corrientes, crazy as a loon, along a clip of the head from the cap'en's trumpet. Them 's facts. The ship was a brigantine, trading along the Mexican coast. The cap'en had his wife aboard, a little timid Mexican woman he 'd picked up at Mazatlan. I reckon she did n't get on with him any better than the men, for she ups and dies one day, leavin' her baby, a year-old gal. One o' the crew was fond o' that baby. He used to get the black nurse to put it in the dingy, and he 'd tow it astern, rocking it with the painter like a cradle. He did it — hatin' the cap'en all the same. One day the black nurse got out of the dingy for a moment, when the baby was asleep, leavin' him alone with it. An idea took hold on him, jest from cussedness, you 'd say, but it was partly from revenge on the cap'en and partly to get away from the ship. The ship was well in shore, and the current settin' towards it. He slipped the painter — that man — and set himself adrift with the baby. It was a crazy act, you 'd reckon, for there was n't any oars in the boat; but he had a crazy man's luck, and he contrived, by sculling the boat with one of the seats he tore out, to keep her out of the breakers, till he could find a bight in the shore to run her in. The alarm was given from the ship, but the fog shut down upon him; he could hear the other boats in pursuit. They seemed to close in on him, and by the sound he judged the cap'en was just abreast of him in the gig, bearing down upon him in the fog. He slipped out of the dingy into the water without a splash, and struck out for the breakers. He got ashore after havin' been knocked down and dragged in four

times by the undertow. He had only one idea then, thankfulness that he had not taken the baby with him in the surf. You kin put that down for him, — it 's a fact. He got off into the hills, and made his way up to Monterey."

"And the child?" asked the padre, with a sudden and strange asperity that boded no good to the penitent; "the child thus ruthlessly abandoned — what became of it?"

"That 's just it, — the child," said the stranger gravely. "Well, if that man was on his death-bed instead of being here talking to you, he 'd swear that he thought the cap'en was sure to come up to it the next minit. That 's a fact. But it was n't until one day that he — that 's me — ran across one of that crew in Frisco. 'Hallo, Cranch,' sez he to me, 'so you got away, did n't you? And how 's the cap'en's baby? Grown a young gal by this time, ain't she?' 'What are you talking about,' sez I; 'how should I know?' He draws away from me, and sez, 'D— it,' sez he, 'you don't mean that you' — I grabs him by the throat and makes him tell me all. And then it appears that the boat and the baby were never found again, and every man of that crew, cap'en and all, believed I had stolen it."

He paused. Father Pedro was staring at the prospect with an uncompromising rigidity of head and shoulder.

"It 's a bad lookout for me, ain't it?" the stranger continued, in serious reflection.

"How do I know," said the priest harshly, without turning his head, "that you did not make away with this child?"

"Beg pardon."

"That you did not complete your revenge by — by — killing it, as your comrade suspected you? Ah! Holy Trinity," continued Father Pedro, throwing out his hands with an impatient gesture, as if to take the place of unutterable thought.

"How do *you* know?" echoed the stranger coldly.

"Yes."

The stranger linked his fingers together and threw them over his knee, drew it up to his chest caressingly, and said quietly, "Because you *do* know."

The padre rose to his feet.

"What mean you?" he said, sternly fixing his eyes upon the speaker. Their eyes met. The stranger's were gray and persistent, with hanging corner lids that might have concealed even more purpose than they showed. The padre's were hollow, open, and the whites slightly brown, as if with tobacco stains. Yet they were the first to turn away.

"I mean," returned the stranger, with the same practical gravity, "that you know it would n't pay me to come here, if I'd killed the baby, unless I wanted you to fix things right with me up there," pointing skyward, "and get absolution; and I've told you *that* was n't in my line."

"Why do you seek me, then?" demanded the padre suspiciously.

"Because I reckon I thought a man might be allowed to confess something short of a murder. If you're going to draw the line below that" —

"This is but sacrilegious levity," interrupted Father Pedro, turning as if to go. But the stranger did not make any movement to detain him.

"Have you implored forgiveness of the father — the man you wronged — before you came here?" asked the priest, lingering.

"Not much. It would n't pay if he was living, and he died four years ago."

"You are sure of that?"

"I am."

"There are other relations, perhaps?"

"None."

Father Pedro was silent. When he spoke again, it was with a changed voice. "What is your purpose, then?" he asked, with the first indication of priestly sympathy in his manner. "You cannot ask forgiveness of the earthly father you have injured, you refuse the intercession of Holy Church with the Heavenly Father you have disobeyed. Speak, wretched man! What is it you want?"

"I want to find the child."

"But if it were possible, if she were still living, are you fit to seek her, to even make yourself known to her, to appear before her?"

"Well, if I made it profitable to her, perhaps."

"Perhaps," echoed the priest scornfully. "So be it. But why come here?"

"To ask your advice. To know how to begin my search. You know this country. You were here when that boat drifted ashore beyond that mountain."

"Ah, indeed. I have much to do with it! It is an affair of the alcalde — the authorities — of your — your police."

"Is it?"

The padre again met the stranger's eyes. He stopped, with the snuff-box he had somewhat ostentatiously drawn from his pocket still open in his hand.

"Why is it not, señor?" he demanded.

"If she lives, she is a young lady by this time, and might not want the details of her life known to any one."

"And how will you recognize your baby in this young lady?" asked Father Pedro, with a rapid gesture, indicating the comparative heights of a baby and an adult.

"I reckon I'll know her, and her clothes too; and whoever found her would n't be fool enough to destroy them."

"After fourteen years! Good! You have faith, señor" —

"Cranch," supplied the stranger, consulting his watch. "But time's up. Business is business. Good-by; don't let me keep you."

He extended his hand.

The padre met it with a dry, unsympathetic palm, as sere and yellow as the hills. When their hands separated, the father still hesitated, looking at Cranch. If he expected further speech or entreaty from him he was mistaken, for the American, without turning his head, walked in the same serious, practical fashion down the avenue of fig-trees, and disappeared beyond the hedge of vines. The outlines of the mountain beyond were already lost in the fog. Father Pedro turned into the refectory.

"Antonio."

A strong flavor of leather, onions, and stable preceded the entrance of a short, stout vaquero from the little patio.

"Saddle Pinto and thine own mule to accompany Francisco, who will take letters from me to the Father Superior at San José to-morrow at daybreak."

"At daybreak, reverend father?"

"At daybreak. Hark ye, go by the mountain trails and avoid the highway. Stop at no posada nor fonda; but if the child is weary, rest then awhile at Don Juan Briones' or at the rancho of the Blessed Fisherman. Have no converse with stragglers, least of all those gentile Americanos. So" —

The first strokes of the Angelus came from the nearer tower. With a gesture Father Pedro waved Antonio aside, and opened the door of the sacristy.

"*Ad Majorem Dei Gloria.*"

II

The hacienda of Don Juan Briones, nestling in a wooded cleft of the foothills, was hidden, as Father Pedro had wisely reflected, from the straying feet of travelers along the dusty highway to San José. As Francisco, emerging from the cañada, put spurs to his mule at the sight of the whitewashed walls, Antonio grunted: —

"Oh, aye, little priest! thou wast tired enough a moment ago, and though we are not three leagues from the Blessed Fisherman, thou couldst scarce sit thy saddle longer. Mother of God! and all to see that little mongrel, Juanita."

"But, good Antonio, Juanita was my playfellow, and I may not soon again chance this way. And Juanita is not a mongrel, no more than I am."

"She is a mestiza, and thou art a child of the church, though this following of gypsy wenches does not show it."

"But Father Pedro does not object," urged the boy.

"The reverend father has forgotten he was ever young," replied Antonio sententiously, "or he would n't set fire and tow together."

"What sayest thou, good Antonio?" asked Francisco quickly, opening his blue eyes in frank curiosity; "who is fire, and who is tow?"

The worthy muleteer, utterly abashed and confounded by this display of the acolyte's direct simplicity, contented himself by shrugging his shoulders, and a vague "Quien sabe?"

"Come," said the boy gayly, "confess it is only the aguardiente of the Blessed Fisherman thou missest. Never fear, Juanita will find thee some. And see! here she comes."

There was a flash of white flounces along the dark brown

corridor, the twinkle of satin slippers, the flying out of long black braids, and with a cry of joy a young girl threw herself upon Francisco as he entered the patio, and nearly dragged him from his mule.

"Have a care, little sister," laughed the acolyte, looking at Antonio, "or there will be a conflagration. Am I the fire?" he continued, submitting to the two sounding kisses the young girl placed upon either cheek, but still keeping his mischievous glance upon the muleteer.

"Quien sabe?" repeated Antonio gruffly, as the young girl blushed under his significant eyes. "It is no affair of mine," he added to himself, as he led Pinto away. "Perhaps Father Pedro is right, and this young twig of the church is as dry and sapless as himself. Let the mestiza burn if she likes."

"Quick, Pancho," said the young girl, eagerly leading him along the corridor. "This way. I must talk with thee before thou seest Don Juan; that is why I ran to intercept thee, and not as that fool Antonio would signify, to shame thee. Wast thou ashamed, my Pancho?"

The boy threw his arm familiarly round the supple, stayless little waist, accented only by the belt of the light flounced saya, and said, "But why this haste and feverishness, 'Nita? And now I look at thee, thou hast been crying."

They had emerged from a door in the corridor into the bright sunlight of a walled garden. The girl dropped her eyes, cast a quick glance around her, and said, —

"Not here — to the arroyo;" and half leading, half dragging him, made her way through a copse of manzanita and alder until they heard the faint tinkling of water. "Dost thou remember," said the girl, "it was here," pointing to an embayed pool in the dark current, "that I baptized thee, when Father Pedro first brought thee here, when we both played at being monks? They were dear old days, for

Father Pedro would trust no one with thee but me, and always kept us near him."

"Aye, and he said I would be profaned by the touch of any other, and so himself always washed and dressed me, and made my bed near his."

"And took thee away again, and I saw thee not till thou camest with Antonio, over a year ago, to the cattle branding. And now, my Pancho, I may never see thee again." She buried her face in her hands and sobbed aloud.

The little acolyte tried to comfort her, but with such abstraction of manner and inadequacy of warmth that she hastily removed his caressing hand.

"But why? What has happened?" he asked eagerly.

The girl's manner had changed. Her eyes flashed, and she put her brown fist on her waist, and began to rock from side to side.

"But I'll not go," she said viciously.

"Go where?" asked the boy.

"Oh, where?" she echoed impatiently. "Hear me, Francisco. Thou knowest I am, like thee, an orphan; but I have not, like thee, a parent in the Holy Church. For, alas!" she added bitterly, "I am not a boy, and have not a lovely voice borrowed from the angels. I was, like thee, a foundling, kept by the charity of the reverend fathers, until Don Juan, a childless widower, adopted me. I was happy, not knowing and caring who were the parents who had abandoned me, happy only in the love of him who became my adopted father. And now" — She paused.

"And now?" echoed Francisco eagerly.

"And now they say it is discovered who are my parents."

"And they live?"

"Mother of God! no," said the girl, with scarcely filial piety. "There is some one, a thing, a mere Don Fulano, who knows it all, it seems, who is to be my guardian."

"But how? Tell me all, dear Juanita," said the boy with a feverish interest, that contrasted so strongly with his previous abstraction that Juanita bit her lips with vexation.

"Ah! How? Santa Barbara! An extravaganza for children. A necklace of lies. I am lost from a ship of which my father — Heaven rest him! — is general, and I am picked up among the weeds on the seashore, like Moses in the bulrushes. A pretty story, indeed."

"Oh, how beautiful!" exclaimed Francisco enthusiastically. "Ah, Juanita, would it had been me!"

"*Thee!*" said the girl bitterly, — "thee! No! — it was a girl wanted. Enough, it was me."

"And when does the guardian come?" persisted the boy, with sparkling eyes.

"He is here even now, with that pompous fool the American alcalde from Monterey, a wretch who knows nothing of the country or the people, but who helped the other American to claim me. I tell thee, Francisco, like as not it is all a folly, — some senseless blunder of those Americanos that impose upon Don Juan's simplicity and love for them."

"How looks he, this Americano who seeks thee?" asked Francisco.

"What care I how he looks," said Juanita, "or what he is? He may have the four S's, for all I care. Yet," she added with a slight touch of coquetry, "he is not bad to look upon, now I recall him."

"Had he a long mustache, and a sad, sweet smile, and a voice so gentle and yet so strong that you felt he ordered you to do things without saying it? And did his eye read your thoughts? — that very thought that you must obey him?"

"Saints preserve thee, Pancho! Of whom dost thou speak?"

"Listen, Juanita. It was a year ago, the eve of Nativi-

dad; he was in the church when I sang. Look where I would, I always met his eye. When the canticle was sung and I was slipping into the sacristy, he was beside me. He spoke kindly, but I understood him not. He put into my hand gold for an aguinaldo. I pretended I understood not that also, and put it into the box for the poor. He smiled, and went away. Often have I seen him since; and last night, when I left the Mission, he was there again with Father Pedro."

"And Father Pedro — what said he of him?" asked Juanita.

"Nothing." The boy hesitated. "Perhaps — because I said nothing of the stranger."

Juanita laughed. "So thou canst keep a secret from the good father when thou carest. But why dost thou think this stranger is my new guardian?"

"Dost thou not see, little sister? He was even then seeking thee," said the boy with joyous excitement. "Doubtless he knew we were friends and playmates — maybe the good father has told him thy secret. For it is no idle tale of the alcalde, believe me. I see it all! It is true!"

"Then thou wilt let him take me away," exclaimed the girl bitterly, withdrawing the little hand he had clasped in his excitement.

"Alas, Juanita, what avails it now? I am sent to San José, charged with a letter to the Father Superior, who will give me further orders. What they are, or how long I must stay, I know not. But I know this: the good Father Pedro's eyes were troubled when he gave me his blessing, and he held me long in his embrace. Pray Heaven I have committed no fault. Still it may be that the reputation of my gift hath reached the Father Superior, and he would advance me;" and Francisco's eyes lit up with youthful pride at the thought.

Not so Juanita. Her black eyes snapped suddenly with

suspicion, she drew in her breath, and closed her little mouth firmly. Then she began a crescendo.

Mother of God! was that all? Was he a child, to be sent away for such time or for such purpose as best pleased the fathers? Was he to know no more than that? With such gifts as God had given him, was he not at least to have some word in disposing of them? Ah! *she* would not stand it.

The boy gazed admiringly at the piquant energy of the little figure before him, and envied her courage. "It is the mestizo blood," he murmured to himself. Then aloud, "Thou shouldst have been a man, 'Nita."

"And thou a woman."

"Or a priest. Eh, what is that?"

They had both risen, Juanita defiantly, her black braids flying as she wheeled and suddenly faced the thicket, Francisco clinging to her with trembling hands and whitened lips. A stone, loosened from the hillside, had rolled to their feet; there was a crackling in the alders on the slope above them.

"Is it a bear, or a brigand?" whispered Francisco hurriedly, sounding the uttermost depths of his terror in the two words.

"It is an eavesdropper," said Juanita impetuously; "and who and why I intend to know," and she started towards the thicket.

"Do not leave me, good Juanita," said the young acolyte, grasping the girl's skirt.

"Nay; run to the hacienda quickly, and leave me to search the thicket. Run!"

The boy did not wait for a second injunction, but scuttled away, his long coat catching in the brambles, while Juanita darted like a kitten into the bushes. Her search was fruitless, however, and she was returning impatiently, when her quick eye fell upon a letter lying amid the dried grass where

she and Francisco had been seated the moment before. It had evidently fallen from his breast when he had risen suddenly, and been overlooked in his alarm. It was Father Pedro's letter to the Father Superior of San José.

In an instant she had pounced upon it as viciously as if it had been the interloper she was seeking. She knew that she held in her fingers the secret of Francisco's sudden banishment. She felt instinctively that this yellowish envelope, with its red string and its blotch of red seal, was his sentence and her own. The little mestiza had not been brought up to respect the integrity of either locks or seals, both being unknown in the patriarchal life of the hacienda. Yet with a certain feminine instinct she looked furtively around her, and even managed to dislodge the clumsy wax without marring the pretty effigy of the crossed keys impressed upon it. Then she opened the letter and read.

Suddenly she stopped and put back her hair from her brown temples. Then a succession of burning blushes followed each other in waves from her neck up, and died in drops of moisture in her eyes. This continued until she was fairly crying, dropping the letter from her hands and rocking to and fro. In the midst of this she quickly stopped again; the clouds broke, a sunshine of laughter started from her eyes, she laughed shyly, she laughed loudly, she laughed hysterically. Then she stopped again as suddenly, knitted her brows, swooped down once more upon the letter, and turned to fly. But at the same moment the letter was quietly but firmly taken from her hand, and Mr. Jack Cranch stood beside her.

Juanita was crimson, but unconquered. She mechanically held out her hand for the letter; the American took her little fingers, kissed them, and said, —

"How are you again?"

"The letter," replied Juanita, with a strong disposition to stamp her foot.

"But," said Cranch, with business directness, "you 've read enough to know it is n't for you."

"Nor for you either," responded Juanita.

"True. It is for the Reverend Father Superior of San José Mission. I 'll give it to him."

Juanita was becoming alarmed, first at this prospect, second at the power the stranger seemed to be gaining over her. She recalled Francisco's description of him with something like superstitious awe.

"But it concerns Francisco. It contains a secret he should know."

"Then you can tell him it. Perhaps it would come easier from you."

Juanita blushed again. "Why?" she asked, half dreading his reply.

"Because," said the American quietly, "you are old playmates; you are attached to each other."

Juanita bit her lips. "Why don't you read it yourself?" she asked bluntly.

"Because I don't read other people's letters, and if it concerns me you 'll tell me."

"What if I don't?"

"Then the Father Superior will."

"I believe you know Francisco's secret already," said the girl boldly.

"Perhaps."

"Then, Mother of God! Señor Crancho, what do you want?"

"I do not want to separate two such good friends as you and Francisco."

"Perhaps you 'd like to claim us both," said the girl, with a sneer that was not devoid of coquetry.

"I should be delighted."

"Then here is your occasion, señor, for here comes my adopted father, Don Juan, and your friend, Señor Br—r—own, the American alcalde."

Two men appeared in the garden path below them. The stiff, glazed, broad-brimmed black hat, surmounting a dark face of quixotic gravity and romantic rectitude, indicated Don Juan Briones. His companion, lazy, specious, and red-faced, was Señor Brown, the American alcalde.

"Well, I reckon we kin about call the thing fixed," said Señor Brown, with a large wave of the hand, suggesting a sweeping away of all trivial details. "Ez I was saying to the don yer, when two high-toned gents like you and him come together in a delicate matter of this kind, it ain't no hoss trade nor sharp practice. The don is that lofty in principle that he's willin' to sacrifice his affections for the good of the gal; and you, on your hand, kalkilate to see all he's done for her, and go your whole pile better. You'll make the legal formalities good. I reckon that old Injin woman who can swear to the finding of the baby on the shore will set things all right yet. For the matter o' that, if you want anything in the way of a certificate, I'm on hand always."

"Juanita and myself are at your disposition, caballeros," said Don Juan, with a grave exaltation. "Never let it be said that the Mexican nation was outdone by the great Americanos in deeds of courtesy and affection. Let it rather stand that Juanita was a sacred trust put into my hands years ago by the goddess of American liberty, and nurtured in the Mexican eagle's nest. Is it not so, my soul?" he added, more humanly, to the girl, when he had quite recovered from the intoxication of his own speech. "We love thee, little one, but we keep our honor."

"There's nothing mean about the old man," said Brown admiringly, with a slight dropping of his left eyelid; "his head is level, and he goes with his party."

"Thou takest my daughter, Señor Cranch," continued the old man, carried away by his emotion; "but the American nation gives me a son."

"You know not what you say, father," said the young girl angrily, exasperated by a slight twinkle in the American's eye.

"Not so," said Cranch. "Perhaps one of the American nation may take him at his word."

"Then, caballeros, you will, for the moment at least, possess yourselves of the house and its poor hospitality," said Don Juan, with time-honored courtesy, producing the rustic key of the gate of the patio. "It is at your disposition, caballeros," he repeated, leading the way as his guests passed into the corridor.

Two hours passed. The hills were darkening on their eastern slopes; the shadows of the few poplars that sparsedly dotted the dusty highway were falling in long black lines that looked like ditches on the dead level of the tawny fields; the shadows of slowly moving cattle were mingling with their own silhouettes, and becoming more and more grotesque. A keen wind rising in the hills was already creeping from the cañada as from the mouth of a funnel, and sweeping the plains. Antonio had forgathered with the servants, had pinched the ears of the maids, had partaken of aguardiente, had saddled the mules, — Antonio was becoming impatient.

And then a singular commotion disturbed the peaceful monotony of the patriarchal household of Don Juan Briones. The stagnant courtyard was suddenly alive with peons and servants, running hither and thither. The alleys and gardens were filled with retainers. A confusion of questions, orders, and outcries rent the air, the plains shook with the galloping of a dozen horsemen. For the acolyte Francisco, of the Mission San Carmel, had disappeared and vanished, and from that day the hacienda of Don Juan Briones knew him no more.

III

When Father Pedro saw the yellow mules vanish under the low branches of the oaks beside the little graveyard, caught the last glitter of the morning sun on Pinto's shining headstall, and heard the last tinkle of Antonio's spurs, something very like a mundane sigh escaped him. To the simple wonder of the majority of early worshipers — the half-breed converts who rigorously attended the spiritual ministrations of the Mission, and ate the temporal provisions of the reverend fathers — he deputed the functions of the first mass to a coadjutor, and, breviary in hand, sought the orchard of venerable pear-trees. Whether there was any occult sympathy in his reflections with the contemplation of their gnarled, twisted, gouty, and knotty limbs, still bearing gracious and goodly fruit, I know not, but it was his private retreat, and under one of the most rheumatic and misshapen trunks there was a rude seat. Here Father Pedro sank, his face toward the mountain wall between him and the invisible sea. The relentless, dry, practical Californian sunlight falling on his face grimly pointed out a night of vigil and suffering. The snuffy yellow of his eyes was injected yet burning, his temples were ridged and veined like a tobacco leaf; the odor of desiccation which his garments always exhaled was hot and feverish, as if the fire had suddenly awakened among the ashes.

Of what was Father Pedro thinking?

He was thinking of his youth, — a youth spent under the shade of those pear-trees, even then venerable as now. He was thinking of his youthful dreams of heathen conquest, emulating the sacrifices and labors of Junipero Serra; a dream cut short by the orders of the archbishop, that sent his companion, Brother Diego, north on a mission to strange lands, and condemned him to the isolation of San Carmel.

He was thinking of that fierce struggle with envy of a fellow creature's better fortune, that, conquered by prayer and penance, left him patient, submissive, and devoted to his humble work; how he raised up converts to the faith, even taking them from the breast of heretic mothers.

He recalled how once, with the zeal of propagandism quickening in the instincts of a childless man, he had dreamed of perpetuating his work through some sinless creation of his own; of dedicating some virgin soul, one over whom he could have complete control, restricted by no human paternal weakness, to the task he had begun. But how? Of all the boys eagerly offered to the church by their parents there seemed none sufficiently pure and free from parental taint. He remembered how one night, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin herself, as he firmly then believed, this dream was fulfilled. An Indian woman brought him a *Waugee* child — a baby girl that she had picked up on the seashore. There were no parents to divide the responsibility, the child had no past to confront, except the memory of the ignorant Indian woman, who deemed her duty done, and whose interest ceased in giving it to the padre. The austere conditions of his monkish life compelled him to the first step in his adoption of it — the concealment of its sex. This was easy enough, as he constituted himself from that moment its sole nurse and attendant, and boldly baptized it among the other children by the name of Francisco. No others knew its origin, nor cared to know. Father Pedro had taken a muchacho foundling for adoption; his jealous seclusion of it and his personal care was doubtless some sacerdotal formula at once high and necessary.

He remembered with darkening eyes and impeded breath how his close companionship and daily care of this helpless child had revealed to him the fascinations of that paternity denied to him; how he had deemed it his duty to struggle

against the thrill of baby fingers laid upon his yellow cheeks, the pleading of inarticulate words, the eloquence of wonder-seeing and mutely questioning eyes; how he had succumbed again and again, and then struggled no more, seeing only in them the suggestion of childhood made incarnate in the Holy Babe. And yet, even as he thought, he drew from his gown a little shoe, and laid it beside his breviary. It was Francisco's baby slipper, a duplicate to those worn by the miniature waxen figure of the Holy Virgin herself in her niche in the transept.

Had he felt during these years any qualms of conscience at this concealment of the child's sex? None. For to him the babe was sexless, as most befitted one who was to live and die at the foot of the altar. There was no attempt to deceive God; what mattered else? Nor was he withholding the child from the ministrations of the sacred sisters. There was no convent near the Mission, and as each year passed, the difficulty of restoring her to the position and duties of her sex became greater and more dangerous. And then the acolyte's destiny was sealed by what again appeared to Father Pedro as a direct interposition of Providence. The child developed a voice of such exquisite sweetness and purity that an angel seemed to have strayed into the little choir, and kneeling worshipers below, transported, gazed upwards, half expectant of a heavenly light breaking through the gloom of the raftered ceiling. The fame of the little singer filled the valley of San Carmel; it was a miracle vouchsafed the Mission; Don José Peralta remembered, ah, yes, to have heard in old Spain of boy choristers with such voices!

And was this sacred trust to be withdrawn from him? Was this life, which he had brought out of an unknown world of sin, unstained and pure, consecrated and dedicated to God, just in the dawn of power and promise for the glory of the Mother Church, to be taken from his side? and

at the word of a self-convicted man of sin — a man whose tardy repentance was not yet absolved by the Holy Church? Never! never! Father Pedro dwelt upon the stranger's rejections of the ministrations of the Church with a pitiable satisfaction; had he accepted it, he would have had a sacred claim upon Father Pedro's sympathy and confidence. Yet he rose again uneasily, and with irregular steps returned to the corridor, passing the door of the familiar little cell beside his own. The window, the table, and even the scant toilette utensils were filled with the flowers of yesterday, some of them withered and dry; the white gown of the little chorister was hanging emptily against the wall. Father Pedro started and trembled; it seemed as if the spiritual life of the child had slipped away with its garments.

In that slight chill, which even in the hottest days in California always invests any shadow cast in that white sunlight, Father Pedro shivered in the corridor. Passing again into the garden, he followed in fancy the wayfaring figure of Francisco, saw the child arrive at the rancho of Don Juan, and with the fateful blindness of all dreamers projected a picture most unlike the reality. He followed the pilgrims even to San José, and saw the child deliver the missive which gave the secret of her sex and condition to the Father Superior. That the authority at San José might dissent with the padre of San Carmel, or decline to carry out his designs, did not occur to the one-idea'd priest. Like all solitary people, isolated from passing events, he made no allowance for occurrences outside of his routine. Yet at this moment a sudden thought whitened his yellow cheek. What if the Father Superior deemed it necessary to impart the secret to Francisco? Would the child recoil at the deception, and, perhaps, cease to love him? It was the first time, in his supreme selfishness, he had taken the acolyte's feelings into account. He had thought of him

only as one owing implicit obedience to him as a temporal and spiritual guide.

"Reverend father!"

He turned impatiently. It was his muleteer, José. Father Pedro's sunken eye brightened.

"Ah, José! Quickly, then; hast thou found Sanchicha?"

"Truly, your reverence! And I have brought her with me, just as she is; though if your reverence make more of her than to fill the six-foot hole and say a prayer over her, I'll give the mule that brought her here for food for the bull's horns. She neither hears nor speaks, but whether from weakness or sheer wantonness, I know not."

"Peace, then! and let thy tongue take example from hers. Bring her with thee into the sacristy and attend without. Go!"

Father Pedro watched the disappearing figure of the muleteer, and hurriedly swept his thin, dry hand, veined and ribbed like a brown November leaf, over his stony forehead, with a sound that seemed almost a rustle. Then he suddenly stiffened his fingers over his breviary, dropped his arms perpendicularly before him, and with a rigid step returned to the corridor and passed into the sacristy.

For a moment in the half darkness the room seemed to be empty. Tossed carelessly in the corner appeared some blankets topped by a few straggling black horsetails, like an unstranded riata. A trembling agitated the mass as Father Pedro approached. He bent over the heap and distinguished in its midst the glowing black eyes of Sanchicha, the Indian centenarian of the Mission San Carmel. Only her eyes lived. Helpless, boneless, and jelly-like, old age had overtaken her with a mild form of deliquescence.

"Listen, Sanchicha," said the father gravely. "It is important that thou shouldst refresh thy memory for a moment. Look back fourteen years, mother; it is but yes-

terday to thee. Thou dost remember the baby — a little muchacha thou broughtest me then — fourteen years ago? "

The old woman's eyes became intelligent, and turned with a quick look towards the open door of the church, and thence towards the choir.

The padre made a motion of irritation. "No, no! Thou dost not understand; thou dost not attend me. Knowest thou of any mark of clothing, trinket, or amulet found upon the babe? "

The light of the old woman's eyes went out. She might have been dead. Father Pedro waited a moment, and then laid his hand impatiently on her shoulder.

" Dost thou mean there are none? "

A ray of light struggled back into her eyes.

" None."

" And thou hast kept back, or put away no sign nor mark of her parentage? Tell me, on this crucifix."

The eyes caught the crucifix, and became as empty as the orbits of the carven Christ upon it.

Father Pedro waited patiently. A moment passed; only the sound of the muleteer's spurs was heard in the courtyard.

" It is well," he said at last, with a sigh of relief. " Pepita shall give thee some refreshment, and José will bring thee back again. I will summon him."

He passed out of the sacristy door, leaving it open. A ray of sunlight darted eagerly in, and fell upon the grotesque heap in the corner. Sanchicha's eyes lived again; more than that, a singular movement came over her face. The hideous caverns of her toothless mouth opened — she laughed. The step of José was heard in the corridor, and she became again inert.

The third day, which should have brought the return of Antonio, was nearly spent. Father Pedro was impatient, but not alarmed. The good fathers at San José might natu-

rally detain Antonio for the answer, which might require deliberation. If any mischance had occurred to Francisco, Antonio would have returned or sent a special messenger. At sunset he was in his accustomed seat in the orchard, his hands clasped over the breviary in his listless lap, his eyes fixed upon the mountain between him and that mysterious sea that had brought so much into his life. He was filled with a strange desire to see it, a vague curiosity hitherto unknown to his preoccupied life; he wished to gaze upon that strand, perhaps the very spot where she had been found; he doubted not his questioning eyes would discover some forgotten trace of her; under his persistent will and aided by the Holy Virgin, the sea would give up its secret. He looked at the fog creeping along the summit, and recalled the latest gossip of San Carmel; how that since the advent of the Americanos it was gradually encroaching on the Mission. The hated name vividly recalled to him the features of the stranger as he had stood before him three nights ago, in this very garden, — so vividly that he sprang to his feet with an exclamation. It was no fancy, but Señor Cranch himself advancing from under the shadow of a pear-tree.

"I reckoned I 'd catch you here," said Mr. Cranch, with the same dry, practical business fashion, as if he were only resuming an interrupted conversation; "and I reckon I ain't going to keep you a minit longer than I did t' other day." He mutely referred to his watch, which he already held in his hand, and then put it back in his pocket. "Well! we found her!"

"Francisco?" interrupted the priest with a single stride, laying his hand upon Cranch's arm, and staring into his eyes.

Mr. Cranch quietly removed Father Pedro's hand. "I reckon that was n't the name as *I* caught it," he returned dryly. "Had n't you better sit down?"

"Pardon me — pardon me, señor," said the priest, hastily sinking back upon his bench; "I was thinking of other things. You — you — came upon me suddenly. I thought it was the acolyte. Go on, señor! I am interested."

"I thought you 'd be," said Cranch quietly. "That 's why I came. And then you might be of service too."

"True, true," said the priest, with rapid accents; "and this girl, señor, this girl is" —

"Juanita, the mestiza, adopted daughter of Don Juan Briones, over on the Santa Clare Valley," replied Cranch, jerking his thumb over his shoulder, and then sitting down upon the bench beside Father Pedro.

The priest turned his feverish eyes piercingly upon his companion for a few seconds, and then doggedly fixed them upon the ground. Cranch drew a plug of tobacco from his pocket, cut off a portion, placed it in his cheek, and then quietly began to strap the blade of his jack-knife upon his boot. Father Pedro saw it from under his eyelids, and even in his preoccupation despised him.

"Then you are certain she is the babe you seek?" said the father, without looking up.

"I reckon as near as you can be certain of anything. Her age tallies; she was the only foundling girl baby baptized by you, you know," — he partly turned round appealingly to the padre, — "that year. Injin woman says she picked up a baby. Looks like a pretty clear case, don't it?"

"And the clothes, friend Cranch?" said the priest, with his eyes still on the ground, and a slight assumption of easy indifference.

"They will be forthcoming, like enough, when the time comes," said Cranch. "The main thing at first was to find the girl — that was *my* job. The lawyers, I reckon, can fit the proofs and say what 's wanted, later on."

"But why lawyers," continued Padre Pedro, with a slight sneer he could not repress, "if the child is found and Señor Cranch is satisfied?"

"On account of the property. Business is business!"

"The property?"

Mr. Cranch pressed the back of his knife-blade on his boot, shut it up with a click, and putting it in his pocket said calmly, —

"Well, I reckon the million of dollars that her father left when he died, which naturally belongs to her, will require some proof that she is his daughter."

He had placed both his hands in his pockets, and turned his eyes full upon Father Pedro. The priest arose hurriedly.

"But you said nothing of this before, Señor Cranch," said he, with a gesture of indignation, turning his back quite upon Cranch, and taking a step towards the refectory.

"Why should I? I was looking after the girl, not the property," returned Cranch, following the padre with watchful eyes, but still keeping his careless, easy attitude.

"Ah, well! Will it be said so, think you? Eh! Bueno. What will the world think of your sacred quest, eh?" continued the Padre Pedro, forgetting himself in his excitement, but still averting his face from his companion.

"The world will look after the proofs, and I reckon not bother if the proofs are all right," replied Cranch carelessly; "and the girl won't think the worse for me for helping her to a fortune. Hallo! you 've dropped something." He leaped to his feet, picked up the breviary which had fallen from the padre's fingers, and returned it to him with a slight touch of gentleness that was unsuspected in the man.

The priest's dry, tremulous hand grasped the volume without acknowledgment.

"But these proofs?" he said hastily; "these proofs, señor?"

"Oh, well, you 'll testify to the baptism, you know."

"But if I refuse; if I will have nothing to do with this thing! If I will not give my word that there is not some mistake," said the priest, working himself into a feverish indignation; "that there are not slips of memory, eh? Of so many children baptized, is it possible for me to know which, eh? And if this Juanita is not your girl, eh?"

"Then you 'll help me to find who is," said Cranch coolly.

Father Pedro turned furiously on his tormentor. Overcome by his vigil and anxiety, he was oblivious of everything but the presence of the man who seemed to usurp the functions of his own conscience. "Who are you, who speak thus?" he said hoarsely, advancing upon Cranch with outstretched and anathematizing fingers. "Who are you, Señor Heathen, who dare to dictate to me, a father of Holy Church? I tell you, I will have none of this. Never! I will not! From this moment, you understand — nothing. I will never" —

He stopped. The first stroke of the Angelus rang from the little tower. The first stroke of that bell before whose magic exorcism all human passions fled, the peaceful bell that had for fifty years lulled the little fold of San Carmel to prayer and rest, came to his throbbing ear. His trembling hands groped for the crucifix, carried it to his left breast; his lips moved in prayer. His eyes were turned to the cold, passionless sky, where a few faint, far-spaced stars had silently stolen to their places. The Angelus still rang, his trembling ceased, he remained motionless and rigid.

The American, who had uncovered in deference to the worshiper rather than the rite, waited patiently. The

eyes of Father Pedro returned to the earth, moist as if with dew caught from above. He looked half absently at Cranch.

"Forgive me, my son," he said, in a changed voice. "I am only a worn old man. I must talk with thee more of this — but not to-night — not to-night; — to-morrow — to-morrow — to-morrow."

He turned slowly, and appeared to glide rather than move under the trees, until the dark shadow of the Mission tower met and encompassed him. Cranch followed him with anxious eyes. Then he removed the quid of tobacco from his cheek.

"Just as I reckoned," remarked he quite audibly. "He 's clean gold on the bed rock after all!"

IV

That night Father Pedro dreamed a strange dream. How much of it was reality, how long it lasted, or when he awoke from it, he could not tell. The morbid excitement of the previous day culminated in a febrile exaltation, in which he lived and moved as in a separate existence.

This is what he remembered. He thought he had risen at night in a sudden horror of remorse, and making his way to the darkened church had fallen upon his knees before the high altar, when all at once the acolyte's voice broke from the choir, but in accents so dissonant and unnatural that it seemed a sacrilege, and he trembled. He thought he had confessed the secret of the child's sex to Cranch, but whether the next morning or a week later he did not know. He fancied, too, that Cranch had also confessed some trifling deception to him, but what, or why, he could not remember — so much greater seemed the enormity of his own transgression. He thought Cranch

had put in his hands the letter he had written to the Father Superior, saying that his secret was still safe, and that he had been spared the avowal and the scandal that might have ensued. But through all, and above all, he was conscious of one fixed idea: to seek the seashore with Sanchicha, and upon the spot where she had found Francisco, meet the young girl who had taken his place, and so part from her forever. He had a dim recollection that this was necessary to some legal identification of her, as arranged by Cranch, but how or why he did not understand; enough that it was a part of his penance.

It was early morning when the faithful Antonio, accompanied by Sanchicha and José, rode forth with him from the Mission of San Carmel. Except on the expressionless features of the old woman, there was anxiety and gloom upon the faces of the little cavalcade. He did not know how heavily his strange abstraction and hallucinations weighed upon their honest hearts. As they wound up the ascent of the mountain he noticed that Antonio and José conversed with bated breath and many pious crossings of themselves, but with eyes always wistfully fixed upon him. He wondered if, as part of his penance, he ought not to proclaim his sin and abase himself before them; but he knew that his devoted followers would insist upon sharing his punishment; and he remembered his promise to Cranch, that for *her* sake he would say nothing. Before they reached the summit he turned once or twice to look back upon the Mission. How small it looked, lying there in the peaceful valley, contrasted with the broad sweep of the landscape beyond, stopped at the farther east only by the dim, ghost-like outlines of the Sierras. But the strong breath of the sea was beginning to be felt; in a few moments more they were facing it with lowered sombreros and flying serapes, and the vast, glittering, illimitable Pacific opened out beneath them.

Dazed and blinded, as it seemed to him, by the shining, restless expanse, Father Pedro rode forward as if still in a dream. Suddenly he halted, and called Antonio to his side.

"Tell me, child, didst thou say that this coast was wild and desolate of man, beast, and habitation?"

"Truly I did, reverend father."

"Then what is that?" pointing to the shore.

Almost at their feet nestled a cluster of houses, at the head of an arroyo reaching up from the beach. They looked down upon the smoke of a manufactory chimney, upon strange heaps of material and curious engines scattered along the sands, with here and there moving specks of human figures. In a little bay a schooner swung at her cables.

The vaquero crossed himself in stupefied alarm. "I know not, your reverence; it is only two years ago, before the rodeo, that I was here for strayed colts, and I swear by the blessed bones of San Antonio that it was as I said."

"Ah! it is like these Americanos," responded the muleteer. "I have it from my brother Diego that he went from San José to Pescadero two months ago across the plains, with never a hut nor fonda to halt at all the way. He returned in seven days, and in the midst of the plain there were three houses and a mill and many people. And why was it? Ah! Mother of God! one had picked up in the creek where he drank that much of gold;" and the muleteer tapped one of the silver coins that fringed his jacket sleeves in place of buttons.

"And they are washing the sands for gold there now," said Antonio, eagerly pointing to some men gathered round a machine like an enormous cradle. "Let us hasten on."

Father Pedro's momentary interest had passed. The words of his companions fell dull and meaningless upon his dreaming ears. He was conscious only that the child was more a stranger to him as an outcome of this hard, bustling life, than when he believed her borne to him over the mys-

terious sea. It perplexed his dazed, disturbed mind to think that if such an antagonistic element could exist within a dozen miles of the Mission, and he not know it, could not such an atmosphere have been around him, even in his monastic isolation, and he remain blind to it? Had he really lived in the world without knowing it? Had it been in his blood? Had it impelled him to — He shuddered, and rode on.

They were at the last slope of the zigzag descent to the shore, when he saw the figures of a man and woman moving slowly through a field of wild oats, not far from the trail. It seemed to his distorted fancy that the man was Cranch. The woman! His heart stopped beating. Ah! could it be? He had never seen her in her proper garb: would she look like that? would she be as tall? He thought he bade José and Antonio go on slowly before with Sanchicha, and dismounted, walking slowly between the high stalks of grain lest he should disturb them. They evidently did not hear his approach, but were talking earnestly. It seemed to Father Pedro that they had taken each other's hands, and as he looked Cranch slipped his arm round her waist. With only a blind instinct of some dreadful sacrilege in this act, Father Pedro would have rushed forward, when the girl's voice struck his ear. He stopped, breathless. It was not Francisco, but Juanita, the little mestiza.

"But are you sure you are not pretending to love me now, as you pretended to think I was the muchacha you had run away with and lost? Are you sure it is not pity for the deceit you practiced upon me — upon Don Juan — upon poor Father Pedro?"

It seemed as if Cranch had tried to answer with a kiss, for the girl drew suddenly away from him with a coquettish fling of the black braids, and whipped her little brown hands behind her.

"Well, look here," said Cranch, with the same easy,

good-natured, practical directness which the priest remembered, and which would have passed for philosophy in a more thoughtful man; "put it squarely, then. In the first place, it was Don Juan and the alcalde who first suggested you might be the child."

"But you have said you knew it was Francisco all the time," interrupted Juanita.

"I did; but when I found the priest would not assist me at first, and admit that the acolyte was a girl, I preferred to let him think I was deceived in giving a fortune to another, and leave it to his own conscience to permit it or frustrate it. I was right. I reckon it was pretty hard on the old man, at his time of life, and wrapped up as he was in the girl; but at the moment he came up to the scratch like a man."

"And to save him you have deceived me? Thank you, señor," said the girl with a mock curtsey.

"I reckon I preferred to have you for a wife than a daughter," said Cranch, "if that 's what you mean. When you know me better, Juanita," he continued gravely, "you 'll know that I would never have let you believe I sought in you the one if I had not hoped to find in you the other."

"Bueno! And when did you have that pretty hope?"

"When I first saw you."

"And that was — two weeks ago."

"A year ago, Juanita. When Francisco visited you at the rancho. I followed and saw you."

Juanita looked at him a moment, and then suddenly darted at him, caught him by the lapels of his coat and shook him like a terrier.

"Are you sure that you did not love that Francisco? Speak!" (She shook him again.) "Swear that you did not follow her!"

"But — I did," said Cranch, laughing and shaking between the clenching of the little hands.

"Judas Iscariot! Swear you do not love her all this while."

"But, Juanita!"

"Swear!"

Cranch swore. Then to Father Pedro's intense astonishment she drew the American's face towards her own by the ears and kissed him.

"But you might have loved her, and married a fortune," said Juanita, after a pause.

"Where would have been my reparation — my duty?" returned Cranch, with a laugh.

"Reparation enough for her to have had you," said Juanita, with that rapid disloyalty of one loving woman to another in an emergency. This provoked another kiss from Cranch, and then Juanita said demurely, —

"But we are far from the trail. Let us return, or we shall miss Father Pedro. Are you sure he will come?"

"A week ago he promised to be here to see the proofs to-day."

The voices were growing fainter and fainter; they were returning to the trail.

Father Pedro remained motionless. A week ago! Was it a week ago since — since what? And what had he been doing here? Listening! He! Father Pedro, listening like an idle peon to the confidences of two lovers. But they had talked of him, of his crime — and the man had pitied him! Why did he not speak? Why did he not call after them? He tried to raise his voice. It sank in his throat with a horrible choking sensation. The nearest heads of oats began to nod to him, he felt himself swaying backward and forward. He fell — heavily, down, down, down, from the summit of the mountain to the floor of the Mission chapel, and there he lay in the dark.

. . . . . .

"He moves."

"Blessed Saint Anthony preserve him!"

It was Antonio's voice, it was José's arm, it was the field of wild oats, the sky above his head, — all unchanged.

"What has happened?" said the priest feebly.

"A giddiness seized your reverence just now, as we were coming to seek you."

"And you met no one?"

"No one, your reverence."

Father Pedro passed his hand across his forehead.

"But who are these?" he said, pointing to two figures who now appeared upon the trail.

Antonio turned.

"It is the Americano, Señor Cranch, and his adopted daughter, the mestiza Juanita, seeking your reverence, methinks."

"Ah!" said Father Pedro.

Cranch came forward and greeted the priest cordially.

"It was kind of you, Father Pedro," he said meaningly, with a significant glance at José and Antonio, "to come so far to bid me and my adopted daughter farewell. We depart when the tide serves, but not before you partake of our hospitality in yonder cottage."

Father Pedro gazed at Cranch and then at Juanita.

"I see," he stammered. "But she goes not alone. She will be strange at first. She takes some friend, perhaps — some companion?" he continued tremulously.

"A very old and dear one, Father Pedro, who is waiting for us now."

He led the way to a little white cottage, so little and white and recent, that it seemed a mere fleck of sea-foam cast on the sands. Disposing of José and Antonio in the neighboring workshop and outbuildings, he assisted the venerable Sanchicha to dismount, and, together with Father Pedro and Juanita, entered a white palisaded inclosure beside the cottage, and halted before what appeared to

be a large folding trap-door, covering a slight sandy mound. It was locked with a padlock; beside it stood the American alcalde and Don Juan Briones. Father Pedro looked hastily around for another figure, but it was not there.

"Gentlemen," began Cranch, in his practical business way, "I reckon you all know we 've come here to identify a young lady, who" — he hesitated — "was lately under the care of Father Pedro, with a foundling picked up on this shore fifteen years ago by an Indian woman. How this foundling came here, and how I was concerned in it, you all know. I 've told everybody here how I scrambled ashore, leaving the baby in the dingy, supposing it would be picked up by the boat pursuing me. I 've told some of you," he looked at Father Pedro, "how I first discovered from one of the men, three years ago, that the child was not found by its father. But I have never told any one, before now, I *knew* it was picked up here.

"I never could tell the exact locality where I came ashore, for the fog was coming on as it is now. But two years ago I came up with a party of gold-hunters to work these sands. One day, digging near this creek, I struck something embedded deep below the surface. Well, gentlemen, it was n't gold, but something worth more to me than gold or silver. Here it is."

At a sign the alcalde unlocked the doors and threw them open. They disclosed an irregular trench, in which, filled with sand, lay the half-excavated stern of a boat.

"It was the dingy of the Trinidad, gentlemen; you can still read her name. I found hidden away, tucked under the stern-sheets, mouldy and water-worn, some clothes that I recognized to be the baby's. I knew then that the child had been taken away alive for some purpose, and the clothes were left so that she should carry no trace with her. I recognized the hand of an Indian. I set to work quietly. I found Sanchicha here; she confessed to finding a baby,

but what she had done with it she would not at first say. But since then she has declared before the alcalde that she gave it to Father Pedro of San Carmel, and that here it stands — Francisco that was! — Francisca that is!"

He stepped aside to make way for a tall girl, who had approached from the cottage.

Father Pedro had neither noticed the concluding words nor the movement of Cranch. His eyes were fixed upon the imbecile Sanchicha, — Sanchicha, of whom, to render his rebuke more complete, the Deity seemed to have worked a miracle, and restored intelligence to eye and lip. He passed his hand tremblingly across his forehead, and turned away, when his eye fell upon the last comer.

It was she. The moment he had longed for and dreaded had come. She stood there, animated, handsome, filled with a hurtful consciousness in her new charms, her fresh finery, and the pitiable trinkets that had supplanted her scapulary, and which played under her foolish fingers. The past had no place in her preoccupied mind; her bright eyes were full of eager anticipation of a substantial future. The incarnation of a frivolous world, even as she extended one hand to him in half-coquettish embarrassment she arranged the folds of her dress with the other. At the touch of her fingers he felt himself growing old and cold. Even the penance of parting, which he had looked forward to, was denied him; there was no longer sympathy enough for sorrow. He thought of the empty chorister's robe in the little cell, but not now with regret. He only trembled to think of the flesh that he had once caused to inhabit it.

"That 's all, gentlemen," broke in the practical voice of Cranch. "Whether there are proofs enough to make Francisca the heiress of her father's wealth, the lawyers must say. I reckon it 's enough for me that they give me the chance of repairing a wrong by taking her father's place. After all, it was a mere chance."

"It was the will of God," said Father Pedro solemnly.

They were the last words he addressed them. For when the fog had begun to creep in-shore, hastening their departure, he only answered their farewells by a silent pressure of the hand, mute lips, and far-off eyes.

When the sound of their laboring oars grew fainter, he told Antonio to lead him and Sanchicha again to the buried boat. There he bade her kneel beside him. "We will do penance here, thou and I, daughter," he said gravely. When the fog had drawn its curtain gently around the strange pair, and sea and shore were blotted out, he whispered, "Tell me, it was even so, was it not, daughter, on the night she came?" When the distant clatter of blocks and rattle of cordage came from the unseen vessel, now standing out to sea, he whispered again, "So, this is what thou didst hear, even then." And so during the night he marked, more or less audibly to the half-conscious woman at his side, the low whisper of the waves, the murmur of the far-off breakers, the lightening and thickening of the fog, the phantoms of moving shapes, and the slow coming of the dawn. And when the morning sun had rent the veil over land and sea, Antonio and José found him, haggard but erect, beside the trembling old woman, with a blessing on his lips, pointing to the horizon where a single sail still glimmered: —

"Va Usted con Dios."

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